



The Ethiopian Army

From Victory to Collapse, 1977–1991

FANTAHUN AYELE



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1977–1991

Fantahun Ayele



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*To my parents, who always encouraged me to excel
in my studies despite their illiteracy*

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALF	Afar Liberation Front
AMC	Agricultural Marketing Corporation
AOM	Administration, Organization, and Mobilization
APC	armored personnel carrier
BF	Budget and Finance
BMME	British Military Mission to Ethiopia
E.C.	Ethiopian calendar
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPDM	Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
FORA	Fourth Revolutionary Army
FRA	First Revolutionary Army
GDR	German Democratic Republic
HMGs	heavy machine guns
LMGs	light machine guns
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MC	Military Commissariat
MIDs	Mountain Infantry divisions
MOND	Ministry of National Defense
MOPC	Military Operations and Planning Command
NRTC	National Road Transport Corporation
NCO	Noncommissioned officer

NMS	National Military Service
NMSCDD	National Military Service and Civil Defense Department
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OTI	Operations, Training, and Intelligence
POW	prisoner of war
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
SALF	Somali Abo Liberation Front
SCBs	Special Commando brigades
SRA	Second Revolutionary Army
TPLF	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
TRA	Third Revolutionary Army
WSLF	Western Somali Liberation Front

ALTERNATE SPELLINGS OF NAMES

There is no agreed way of transliterating Amharic into the English alphabet. As a result, many personal names and place names have several alternative spellings, depending on the system of transliteration used. The following is a list of common variants for some of the personal and place names in this book.

Personal names

There are no family names in Ethiopia. A person's first name is the name he or she is given at birth. That name is followed by the father's given name, and sometimes by a grandfather's given name. Any of the names may have two parts.

Abärra Abbäbä (Abera Abebe)
Abbäbä W. Maryam (Abebe W. Mariam)
Addis Agellachäw (Addis Aglachew)
Addis Tädla (Addis Tedla)
al-Nimeiri, Ja'afar Muhammad (al-Numayrī, Nimeiry, Nemery, or
Numeyri, Gaafar)
Alämayähu Dästa (Alemayehu Desta)
Ar'aya Zär'ay (Araya Zeraï, Araya Zeraay)
Assäfa Ayana (Assefa Ayana)
Bähaylu Kendé (Behailu Kinde)
Bärätta Gämoraw (Bereta Gemoraw)
Dämessé Bulto (Demise Bulto, Demisse Bulto, Demese Bulto)
Embibäl Ayyélä (Embibel Ayele)
Fanta Bälay (Fanta Belay, Fanta Belai)
Gäbräyäs W. Hanna (Gebreyes W. Hanna)
Germa Täfäri (Girma Tefferi)
Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam (Haile Giorgis Habte Mariam)
Haylu Bäräwaq (Hailu Berewarq)
Haylu G. Mikael (Hailu G. Michael, Hailu G. Mikael)
Haylu Käbbädä (Hailu Kebede)
Hayyälom Ar'aya (Hayelom Araya)
Hussein Ahmäd (Hussein Ahmed)

Kābbādā Gābré (Kebbede Gebré)
 Kasayé Chāmāda (Kassaye Chemedā)
 Kenfā Gabré'l Denqu (Kinfe Gabriel Dinku)
 Lāggāsā Asfaw (Legesse Asfaw)
 Māngestu H. Maryam (Mengistu H. Mariam)
 Mārdasa Lélisa (Merdasa Lélisa)
 Māre'd Māngāsha (Merid Mengesha)
 Māre'd Negussé (Merid Negussie, Mered Negusse)
 Māsfin Gābrā Qal (Mesfin Gebre Kal, Mesfin Gabreqal)
 Mulatu Nāgash (Mulatu Negash)
 Qumlachāw Dājāné (Kumlachew Dejene, Qumilachew Dejene)
 Rāggasa Jimma (Regasa Jimma, Regassa Jimma)
 Ras Abbābā Arāgay (Ras Abebe Aregai)
 Ras Emeru (Ras Imru)
 Ras Tāfāri (later Emperor Haylā Sellasè, also spelled Haile Selassie)
 Şadqan G. Tānsay (Tsadkan G. Tensay)
 Samora Yānus (Samora Yenus)
 Sārāqā Berhan (Sereke Berhan)
 Tāfāri Bānti (Teferi Banti)
 Tāmāsgān Gāmāchu (Temesgen Gemechu)
 Tariku Ayné (Tariku Ayene, Tariku Aine)
 Tāsfayé G. Kidan (Tsfaye G. Kidan)
 Tāsfayé H. Maryam (Tsfaye H. Mariam)
 Tāshomā Tāsāmma (Teshome Tessema)
 Telahun Argaw (Tilahun Argaw)
 Wubātu Şāggayé (Wubetu Tsegaye)

Place names

Abbay River (Abay River, also known as the Blue Nile)
 Abiy Addi (Ābīy Ādī, Abbi Addi)
 Addi Da'ero (Ādī Da'iro, Adi Da'iro)
 Addi Hagāray (Ādī Hageray)
 Addis Zāmān (Addis Zemen)
 Adi Qāyeh (Adi Caieh)
 Adwa (Ādwa)
 Afabét (Afabet)
 Afar (Āfar)
 Ajbar (Ājbar)
 Akalā Guzay (Akale Guzai, Akkale Guzay)
 Aksum (Axum)
 Alām Kātāma (Alem Ketema)
 Amba Alagé (Āmba Ālagē)
 Aqordat (Akordat)

Asmära (Asmara)
 Assäb (Assab)
 Awaré (Āware)
 Awash River (Āwash River)
 Azäzo (Azezo)
 Babbillé (Babille, Babile)
 Bägémeder (Bagemder, Begemedir)
 Baher Dar (Bahir Dar)
 Balé (Bale)
 Bäréntu (Barentu)
 Däbarq (Debarq, Debark, Dabarq)
 Däbrä Berhan (Debre Berhan, Debre Birhan)
 Däbrä Marqos (Debre Markos, Debre Marqos)
 Däbrä Tabor (Debre Tabor)
 Däbrä Zäbit (Debre Zebit)
 Däbrä Zäyet (Debre Zeyit)
 Dägähabur (Dagahabur)
 Däjän (Dejen)
 Dässé (Dessie, Dese)
 Diré (Dire, Dirē)
 Diré Dawa (Dirē Dawa, Dire Dawa)
 Doro Geber (Doro Gibir)
 El Karré (El Kere, Ēl Kerē)
 Enticho (Intich'o)
 Férfér (Ferfer)
 Fiq (Fik)
 Fogära (Fogera)
 Godé (Gode, Godē)
 Goha Şeyon (Goha Ts'iyon)
 Gondär (Gondar, Gonder)
 Gudär (Guder)
 Hagärä Sälam (Hāgere Selam)
 Hamasén (Hamasién)
 Harär (Harar, Harer)
 Harärgé (Harerge)
 Hayq (Hayk)
 Humära (Humera)
 Kabé (Kabī)
 Käfa (Kefa)
 Koräm (Korem)
 Kuta Bär (Kuta Ber)
 Lämi (Lemi)
 Mähal Méda (Mehal Mēda)
 Mäkanä Iyäsus (Mekane Iyesus)

Mäqälé (Mek'ele, Mekele)
 Märäb River (Mereb, Marab, Mareb River)
 Märañña (Meragna)
 Märhabété (Merhâbête)
 Märsa (Mersa)
 Mätämma (Metemma, Metema)
 May Brazio (May Beraziyo)
 Maychäw (Maychew, Maych'ew)
 Meşewa (Massawa)
 Molalé (Molalê)
 Mount Asäbot (Mount Asebot, Asabot)
 Mount Iyäsus (Mount Iyesus)
 Näfas Mäwcha (Nefas Mewch'a)
 Nägällé (Negele, Nagele)
 Nägällè Boräna (Negele Borena)
 Naqfa (Nakfa)
 Ogadén (Ogaden)
 Qäbri Dähar (Kebri Dehar)
 Qañäw (Kagnew)
 Sāla Dengay (Sela Dingay)
 Säläkläka (Selekleka)
 Sārayä (Seraye)
 Säs Amba (Ses Amba)
 Sheré (Shire), also known as Enda Selassé (Inda Selassie or Inda Silase)
 Täbasit Mountains (Tebasit Mountains)
 Tākäzé River (Tekezê River)
 Tānta (Tenta, T'enta)
 Tarma Bär (Tarma Ber)
 Tis Abbay (Tis Abbay, T'is Abay)
 Togochalé (Togoch'alê)
 Wabé Shäbällé River (Wabe Shelebe River)
 Wälläga (Welega)
 Wärä Ilu (Were Ilu, Ware Ilu)
 Wardér (Warder)
 Wärräta (Wereta)
 Weqro (Wikro)
 Woldya (Woldia, Weldiya)
 Wollo (Wolo)
 Wuchalé (Wuchale, Wuch'alê, Wuchale, Wich'alê)
 Wuqro (Wukro, Wik'ro)
 Wurgëssa (Wirgësa, Wurgessa, Wergesa)
 Zärät (Zeret)

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PREFACE

When I was a high school student, I read a sensational story that appeared in the *Addis Zāmān* newspaper. It was about an extraordinary feat of bravery by a soldier who had been serving in Eritrea, then a province of Ethiopia. The story impressed me very much and kindled my interest in military history.

In May 1991, I was in Addis Ababa doing my graduate studies. During this time, the army was disintegrating. Days before the fall of Addis Ababa into the hands of the EPRDF insurgents, pensive-looking and demoralized soldiers retreated to the capital. I still vividly remember their despair. Soon after the collapse of the army, it became common to see soldiers begging in the streets of Addis.

I was on a research leave in late 2002 and early 2003, and I decided to write about the army. I was not sure whether it was possible to get access to the archives of the Ministry of National Defense (MOND), but I convinced myself that I should try. I brought an official letter to the Ministry of National Defense asking for access to the archives. Initially, the letter was wrongly addressed, and I had to go back to Baher Dar and get the letter addressed to the Office of the Chief of Staff. To my complete surprise, after several weeks, I was finally granted permission to get into the “gold mine.” It was one of the happiest moments of my life.

Rarely accessed before, these archives encompass almost everything about the army. By renewing my permission every year, I was able to consult hundreds of dead files over six years. These archives have formed the backbone of my book.

The information gathered from these priceless archives has been backed up by extensive field research. With the exception of Eritrea, I have traveled widely not only to gather oral information from ex-combatants and peasants in former battle zones, but also to study the topography of major battlefields and assess the impact of the terrain on operations. I have thus visited (in this order) Karra Mara, Jijiga, Harār, Diré Dawa, Lāmi, Alām Kātāma, Mārañña, Karra Mesheg, Māhal Méda, Wārä Ilu, Guguftu, Dässé, Kuta Bär, Hayq, Gimba, Allamata, Mäqälé, Sheré (Enda Sellasé), Däbarq, Dabat, Mount Guna, Kemer Dengay, Däbrä Tabor, and Wärräta. In an attempt to get some insight about the battles fought in those places, I watched documentary films for a couple of weeks at the Ethiopian television studios.

In addition to interviewing many privates, NCOs, and junior officers, I

have met with more than a dozen army generals, including those who led major operations and headed key sectors of military organization, such as logistics and military intelligence. In my quest to hear information straight from the horse's mouth, I was able to establish contacts with the former president and commander in chief Māngestu H. Maryam (also spelled Mengistu H. Mariam), with the help of an old friend and an army general living in London. Initially, Māngestu expressed his willingness to respond to my inquiries. He acknowledged receiving my questions and a book (titled *Ay Meṣewa*) he wanted sent along with the questions. Unfortunately, he later changed his mind and refused to respond. I suspect that he backed away once he saw my questions because most required him to admit that he committed strategic mistakes on various fronts. In an attempt to listen to what former insurgents have to say about the war, I have also interviewed several former fighters of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) and a few of their commanders.

Such archival and oral sources have been substantiated by available published and unpublished works. My six-month stay at the University of Naples in Italy enabled me to consult works that otherwise would have been out of my reach. It was during this same sojourn that I managed not only to find an invaluable book published in Asmāra but also to interview a former Eritrean fighter who had come from Asmāra for a conference.

Before I begin, I need to point out my regret for being unable to travel to Eritrea to visit major battlefields, interview more former fighters, and consult Eritrean archives. Since the 1998 outbreak of war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, travel has been banned, and I know that Eritrean officials would never allow access to their archives. However, this gap has been effectively filled with the enormous archival and oral information I have gathered during the course of my research. All these priceless materials are put to meticulous use in this investigation of the anatomy of the Ethiopian army between 1977 and 1991.

The Ethiopian Army

Introduction

The Ethiopian revolution of 1974 set in motion probably the most turbulent period in the country's recent history. In its earliest stage, the revolution had striking similarities to the French and Russian revolutions. Both the French and Russian revolutionaries faced internal division, domestic rebellion, and external aggression. To defend the revolution, the new French leaders—the Jacobins—issued a decree in February 1793 to levy 300,000 men.¹ For their part, the Bolsheviks raised a huge force known as the Red Army to defend the Russian Revolution from internal opponents and external invaders.²

The Ethiopian situation was no different. The socialist regime led by Māngestu H. Maryam, called the Dārg (also spelled Derg or Dergue, the Amharic word borrowed from Ge'ez for *committee*), took over Ethiopia in 1974 and ruled the country until 1991. In 1976–1977, in addition to the threat of invasion from Somalia, the Dārg faced internal division as well as domestic rebellion from several ethnic nationalist liberation fronts and multinational opposition groups. In an act that seemed to mirror the French revolutionaries, the Dārg decided to raise a force of 300,000 men in 1977 to repulse the Somali invasion and stamp out internal rebellion.³

In 1978, the army scored a stunning victory over Somalia and regained most of Eritrea, a region along the Red Sea that Ethiopia had claimed as its integral part since ancient times. This victory seems to have shaped the Dārg's military thinking. Presumably believing that the army could prevail over its enemies by sheer weight of numbers, it raised the number of divisions from four to more than thirty-eight, with nearly half a million men in arms.⁴

Despite its superiority in arms and numbers, the army was beaten by much smaller rebel groups, and it finally disintegrated in 1991. Since then, this dramatic and traumatic collapse of the army has puzzled many people.

So far, with the exception of a few articles, a couple of senior essays, some memoirs, and a recently published work, no major research has been conducted on the Ethiopian army. The few studies to date focus almost exclusively on the major operations of the Ethiopian army, such as the war with Somalia in 1977–1978; Operation Red Star, an offensive against the Eritre-

an People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in 1982; and the Battles of Afabét and Sheré (also known as Enda Selassé) in 1988 and 1989. While useful, such studies only reveal the tip of the iceberg; the army's contemporary history remains largely unexplored.

What makes this book essentially different from earlier studies is the extensive use of archival and oral sources. These sources add depth and shed new light on operations, as well as illuminate previously unexplored aspects of the army, such as recruitment, training, equipment, organization, command and control, logistics, and military intelligence. I believe this historical research will finally unknot the main puzzle: Why did the army lose the war?

CHAPTER ONE

The Army of the Ethiopian Empire (1941–1974)

The imperial tradition

The army has been, beyond all dispute, one of the oldest institutions in Ethiopia. The imperial army existed, in one form or another, since the Aksumite times. Despite the army's indispensability for maintaining law and order, it remained traditional in its organization for a long time. Apart from sporadic attempts of medieval rulers to get military and other technical assistance from Europe, no attempt was made to organize the army along modern lines until the nineteenth century.

It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that Emperor Téwodros II, who reigned from 1855 to 1868, single-handedly tried to create a well-organized, well-disciplined, and better-equipped professional army. Among other things, Téwodros introduced new military titles by way of promoting the existing chain of command. It was also his intention to combine the regional armies to form a disciplined national army. Probably the most remarkable aspect of Téwodros's military reform was his determination to produce modern weapons locally. And the country did begin to produce mortars and cannons. Eventually, however, all those attempts failed to bring about the desired result.¹

Téwodros's successor, Yohannes IV, followed a different path to equip his army. He managed to acquire modern weapons through reward (from the British military expedition in return for assistance against Téwodros II) and capture (from the Egyptian invaders at the Battles of Gundät and Gura in 1875 and 1876).²

Likewise, Menilek II was obsessed more with the acquisition of modern weapons than with the modernization of his army.³ He maintained the medieval military organization of regional forces under regional governors, which coexisted with a standing army stationed around the royal court. The latter embraced such units as the *Baldäras* (Keepers of Royal Horses), *Barud Bét*

(House of Gunpowder), and *Tāmānja Yazh* (Bearers of Rifles), all eventually brought under the generic appellation of *Māhal Sāfari* (Soldiers Stationed at the Center). These units of the imperial army were put under the command of an official called the *fitawarari*, who was, in turn, answerable to the emperor. When the ministerial system was introduced in 1907, the *fitawarari* ended up as the war minister.⁴

Modernizing the army

The institution of the modern army had some antecedents in Harär. *Ras* (a title of nobility) Mäkonnen is said to have organized a professional police force to maintain law and order in the town, reviving an old practice of the *emirs* of Harär. Inspired by the establishment of the *Dhawaria* (as the police came to be called at the time) in Harär, Menilek II brought some of the policemen to Addis Ababa and assigned them to enforce curfew in the capital. New recruits soon joined the police and, by 1916, they numbered about three hundred.⁵

A year later, a unit different from the police was organized. Named *Yämäträyäs Zäbäñña* (Machine Gun Guards), the new unit was probably the first force to be organized along modern lines. *Gerazmach* (a military title meaning commander of the left wing) Gäbrä Yohannes Woldä Mädhén, a former NCO who had served in the British colonial army in Kenya, became the first commander of this force. According to the Ministry of National Defense (MOND) archives, *Yämäträyäs Zäbäñña* was the first uniformed army unit.⁶ In 1919, Ras Mäkonnen's son Ras Täfäri (later Emperor Haylä Sellasè, also spelled Haile Selassie) assigned those Ethiopians who had been serving in the British colonial army as the King's African Rifles to train the bodyguard in collaboration with some Russian émigré officers. The training given at home was augmented by foreign military studies. Thus, in the 1920s, some young Ethiopians were sent to the French military academy of St.-Cyr. In 1924, the bodyguard was issued grand uniforms following Täfäri's tour of Europe. By 1928, Täfäri had about 5,000 well-trained members of the bodyguard. It was in the same year that the *Yämäträyäs Zäbäñña* was given a new name—the Imperial Bodyguard.⁷

A year later, the Belgian Military Mission under the leadership of an officer known only as Major Dothée came to Ethiopia to take over the organization and training of the Imperial Bodyguard. The Belgian officers began to train the bodyguard in earnest, and their contract was renewed until 1935. The Imperial Bodyguard was expanded with new recruits from Addis Ababa and its environs. The troops were issued green khaki uniforms similar to those worn by the Belgian army with berets imported from Japan. But they wore no boots. Although the Imperial Bodyguard was based in the capital at Jan Méda, some of its units were stationed at various provincial outposts in Harärgé, Balé, and Wälläga.⁸ On the eve of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935–1936, the

Imperial Bodyguard had four battalions of infantry, a company of machine gun units, and a squadron of cavalry, which were all put under a regiment consisting of 5,000 soldiers.⁹

The Italian invasion

Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, putting the Imperial Bodyguard to a severe test. Since it had little or no experience of actual combat, the bodyguard stayed with the emperor as a reserve force. Although the Italians had already gained the upper hand in earlier engagements, the Imperial Bodyguard took the field in the final confrontation, the Battle of Maychäw. While it failed to reverse the military situation, it earned the admiration of even the Italian commander, who remarked, “The Imperial Guard, supported by a lively fire, moved against our positions, advancing in rushes and making good use of the ground, giving proof of solidity and a remarkable degree of training combined with a superb contempt of danger.”¹⁰

After the fall of Addis Ababa, the Holäta cadets, together with other intellectuals, founded the Black Lion Organization and fought against the Fascist occupation under *Ras* Emeru until the latter’s capture. Those cadets who had been living in Addis Ababa after the Italian “amnesty” became the primary targets of the February Massacre of 1937, when the Italians killed as many as 30,000 Ethiopians. The precious few who survived in exile in Sudan during the Fascist occupation were destined to occupy the highest military posts after 1941.¹¹

Haylä Sellasè modernizes the army

Soon after the restoration of his power in 1941, Emperor Haylä Sellasè put the modernization of the army, a prewar project aborted by the Italian aggression, high on the agenda. Pinning all his hopes on the British, he earnestly asked Sir Philip Mitchell, political officer of the British army in East Africa, to take up the issue with his government.¹²

The British, who assumed a dominant position in Ethiopia as a result of their involvement in the war to liberate the country from Italian rule, agreed to finance, train, and equip the new Ethiopian army. It was to be organized into ten infantry battalions, a regiment of mounted (pack) artillery, a regiment of armored cars, and engineer and signal units.¹³

Before the British took over the whole responsibility, the Ethiopian government gathered the prewar cadets and graduates of Holäta and St.-Cyr and organized the army under the newly established Ministry of War. Although it was poorly equipped, the new army came into existence in June 1941. When the British Military Mission to Ethiopia (BMME), headed by Major General Stephen Seymour Butler, arrived, the groundwork had already been put in place.¹⁴

When the BMME began the organization and training of the army, the main problems facing it were the absence of stores, lack of supplies and equipment, and shortages of clerical and technical staff. With regard to the problem of supplies, the BMME signed contracts with private firms in Addis Ababa in March 1942. For instance, Messrs. Calderon, a firm later bought by Messrs. Diamonds and Co., began to manufacture and supply uniforms and blankets to the army. Similarly, an Armenian resident in Addis Ababa signed a contract to produce cap badges. By the end of 1942, all the soldiers were fitted out with uniforms, but only 35 percent of them were given berets.¹⁵

The organization of the army and procurement of military supplies, which were initially sluggish, began to show marked progress. The BMME decided to strengthen the ten infantry battalions with other supporting units. According to the BMME's plan, each battalion was supposed to have seventy-five infantrymen mounted on mules. Given the shortage of military vehicles and the limited nature of Ethiopia's roads, the training of mounted infantry units was absolutely essential. Needless to say, if such units were to operate, pack animals should be made available. Accordingly, about 1,000 mules were bought in addition to the hundreds of mules and horses captured from the Italians. By 1942, therefore, the army possessed about 250 horses and 2,100 mules. Some of these were given to the Imperial Regiment of Artillery, a unit established in late 1941. By the end of 1942, the artillery regiment had two batteries with full strength and the third was in the process of formation. Another unit, the Armored Car Regiment, was organized in May 1942 and had 205 troops.¹⁶ There were still three other units that had to be set up: the engineering, signal, and medical corps. The engineering unit consisted of a field company (with 300 men trained in field engineering and bridge construction) and the Works and Parks Company (with 760 people). The latter was engaged in the construction of military barracks, maintenance of army headquarters, and completion of the signal school.

The signal unit had a total of one hundred and fifty men and included a wireless section (staffed by fifteen Ethiopian operators) assigned to seven military outposts (Adwa, Däbrä Marqos, Dässé, Gondär, Jimma, Nägällé, and Wondo), telephone and visual signal sections, and a signal school.

The last unit was composed of medical corps. Dressers—physician's assistants—were trained and assigned to various army units. The dressers attached to army units in the provinces were included in the payroll of the local hospitals.¹⁷

All these British-organized army units were stationed in Bägemed, Gojjam, Harär, Jimma, Sidamo, and Tigray (also spelled Tegray, Tigray, or Tigre). Several British officers were assigned to all battalions.¹⁸ Accommodation in some of the barracks, especially at Asäbä Täfäri and Däbrä Marqos, was deplorable. The provincial stations had no electric power or running water.¹⁹

Despite the poor living conditions, a significant improvement in discipline

was noticeable. Such disciplinary problems as desertion (often with weapons), drunkenness, quarrelling, and assaults on guards became less frequent. Troops who had been decorating uniforms with nonmilitary ornaments or wearing them with civilian clothes abandoned such habits. Disciplinary cases were mainly tried by Ethiopian adjutants. It was only in rare cases that offenders were brought before British officers.²⁰

Although the BMME wielded much influence on the army, two units remained outside the British orbit: the Imperial Bodyguard and the Territorial Army. Reorganized in 1941 and put under Swedish officers, the former was kept as an elite force completely independent from the Ministry of War. By 1946, the Imperial Bodyguard had seven battalions with a total of 3,100 troops. Whereas five of its battalions were stationed in Harär and Gojjam, the remaining two stayed in Addis Ababa. In the same year, the Imperial Bodyguard set up its own officer training school at Bélla in the capital. Until 1960, the Imperial Bodyguard continued to receive the attention and special favor of the emperor.²¹

The creation of the Territorial Army, on the other hand, had something to do with the war of liberation from Italian rule and its immediate aftermath. During the war, a considerable number of armed bands ranged over various parts of the country. After liberation, these armed bands, to the government's dismay, continued to roam the countryside. The government thus organized the Territorial Army in 1941 to absorb all the armed bands and prevent them from resorting to banditry. As a matter of rule, only men who possessed rifles could enlist.²² The organization of the Territorial Army was, in effect, killing two birds with one stone. In the first place, the government managed to boost its military power at a stroke. Secondly, it improved the country's security by bringing unregistered weapons under state control.

Initially, however, the Territorial Army was loosely controlled, and its members were on the whole poorly trained and ill disciplined. To avoid such problems, the government wanted to bring the Territorial Army under the BMME. But the British authorities ignored the Ethiopian request and even held up military supplies until the signing of the second Anglo-Ethiopian agreement at the end of 1944. Once that pact was signed,²³ the BMME agreed to shoulder the responsibility of training the Territorial Army, somewhat to the BMME's advantage. For instance, Lieutenant General Kenneth Anderson, the British commander in chief of East Africa, said of the new responsibility of the BMME that the "strengthening of the police forces throughout the country, into which several thousand territorial soldiers will be drafted, will provide for greater tranquility in those parts of Ethiopia adjoining the Reserved Areas and Ogaden."²⁴

By 1945, therefore, eleven battalions of the Territorial Army were brought under the BMME in addition to the ten battalions of the regular army. Later, General Anderson's prediction turned out to be true—many of the territorial

soldiers were gradually absorbed by the regular army and the police force. The absorption of the Territorial Army into the army and the police continued until 1958, when the government decided to maintain and even expand the Territorial Army as a viable reserve force.²⁵

Although the BMME had agreed to bring the Territorial Army up to the required standard, there were still feelings of uneasiness on the part of the Ethiopian government. In 1945, in the very year the BMME assumed the additional responsibility of training eleven battalions of territorial troops, the British government ordered the BMME to slash its £1-million budget by £370,000 instead of raising it.²⁶

Aid from other nations

In the eyes of the Ethiopian government, the British were becoming increasingly unreliable and uncommitted despite the signing of the 1944 agreement. In the political arena, as well, the British did more harm than good, especially in Eritrea and the Ogađen region of southeastern Ethiopia.²⁷ Ethiopia's quest for a more reliable source of military assistance seems to have emanated from these unhealthy relations. The net result was the signing of the Ethiopian-American Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement on May 22, 1953. Lured by the immense strategic importance of Ethiopia, the Americans received a communications base and naval facilities in Eritrea, a former Italian colony along the Red Sea now federated with Ethiopia. The former Italian radio station Radio Marina in Asmāra (later renamed Qañāw) was given to Americans. This communications base was used by the United States as a relay station for the Middle East and the Far East. On their part, they agreed to provide Ethiopia with military assistance for twenty-five years.²⁸ The agreement included the secondment of an American team, the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), to the Ethiopian army. MAAG, which replaced the BMME, was supposed to train and equip three divisions of the Ethiopian army, each with 6,000 men.²⁹ In an attempt not to fall under the sway of a single foreign power, the Ethiopian government invited military missions from other countries.³⁰ Accordingly, the Swedes were put in charge of the Imperial Bodyguard and the air force. The Norwegians were assigned to organize and train the navy.³¹ Likewise, an Indian military mission established and ran the Harär Military Academy.³²

The MAAG officers began their task in a fresh spirit by reorganizing the army into three divisions. The supporting units were also reorganized or expanded to include an armored squadron, an artillery regiment, an engineering battalion, and medical, ordnance, and service corps.³³ By 1956, the three divisions of the army had a total of 16,832 troops. The headquarters of the First, Second, and Third Divisions were in Addis Ababa, Asmāra, and Harär, respectively. The First Division was composed of three brigades (the First,

Second, and Third) with a total of 5,385 soldiers, stationed in Addis Ababa, Däbrä Berhan, Dässé, Däbrä Marqos, and Jimma. The Second Division had 4,557 troops divided unequally into five brigades (the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Twelfth), stationed at Asmära, Täsänäy, and Mayhabär in Eritrea; at Adwa, Kuyha, Maychäw, and Wuqro in Tigray; and at Azäzo and Gorgora in Gondär. The Third Division included four brigades (the Fourth, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh) with 6,890 soldiers. These troops were stationed in El Karré, Nägällé, Wardér, Qäbri Dähar, Dägähabur, Harär, and Diré Dawa.

In addition to combatants stationed throughout the country, the army had various supporting units with a total of 4,148 men. These included adjutants and NCOs working at army headquarters, ordnance departments, arms depots, training camps, and music bands as well as communication workers, army engineers, artillerymen, and medical personnel.³⁴

Problems on the horizon

Such organizations of the army had to be reviewed as the independence of Somalia came closer. For about a decade, the United Kingdom had governed the northern part of Somalia, and Italy ruled the south. The newly independent Somali state, which came into existence on July 1, 1960, hoped to expand its borders, particularly into areas of Ethiopia, Kenya, and other countries where many ethnic Somalis lived.

Fearing problems on the horizon, the Ethiopian government took precautionary measures after a meticulous study of the most likely actions of the future Somali state. One such measure was reorganizing the Third Division in the Ogadén into mobile units. Another measure was the reorganization of the Territorial Army into an effective reserve force. To that effect, a proclamation was issued in October 1958. According to the proclamation, provincial officials would carefully recruit the territorial soldiers from all parts of the country. After being trained, enlisted men would be sent back home and would stay on reserve unless called for active service during emergency situations. They were also expected to show up once a year for mobilization exercises.³⁵

The government felt that the reorganization of the Third Division and the Territorial Army would not by itself guarantee Ethiopia's security and territorial integrity. A proposal to organize a fourth division was thus submitted to MAAG officials. In 1960, following the independence of Somalia and the subsequent advent of the Soviets in the Horn of Africa—also called the Somali Peninsula or northeast Africa—American officials approved Ethiopia's plan to establish the Fourth Division. Accordingly, a ten-man committee composed of Ethiopian and MAAG officers was assigned to study the new organization of the army and submit a proposal. In its proposal, the committee included the reorganization of the army into four divisions with 6,000 troops each.³⁶

Trouble from the Imperial Bodyguard

Before the proposal was put into effect, the Imperial Bodyguard staged an abortive coup in December 1960. Until that moment, the Imperial Bodyguard had received special privileges. These favors included relatively generous allowances, better housing and medical facilities, and duty-free privileges. The Imperial Bodyguard also surpassed other units in training and weaponry. In addition, it was selected to send troops to Korea, a mission that added glory to its name. Such special treatment provoked jealousy among army units. To make matters worse, through its decoding department, the Imperial Bodyguard vigilantly monitored the army's radio communications so as to prevent dissidence and subversive activities.³⁷

Interestingly, the conflict between the bodyguard and other units did not annoy the emperor. After all, it was the emperor who presumably caused the trouble. It was part of his divide-and-rule policy to maintain animosity among the various units of the armed forces.³⁸ Commanders of the bodyguard and the army were selected, as Christopher Clapham remarks, "from men at odds with one another."³⁹ The conflict between the army and the bodyguard was clearly evident during the attempted coup of 1960, when the two forces confronted each other. The brutal repressive measures taken against the plotters are testimony to the fact that the incident was used to settle old scores. Brigadier General Māngestu Neway, leader of the plot, was sentenced to death. Others involved in the coup attempt were hanged, imprisoned, or died while fighting with the army. The commanders of the army and the air force who played key roles in aborting the coup—notably Generals Märe'd Māngäsha, Käbbädä Gäbré, Isayyas Gäbrä Sellasé, and Assäfa Ayana—were awarded medals and promoted to higher posts. By then, it had become painfully clear to the emperor that he was wrong in putting so much trust in the bodyguard.⁴⁰

Reorganization and expansion

Soon after the suppression of the coup, the government set out to reorganize the army. The years 1960 and 1961 were crucial to the army in several ways. The attempted coup; the independence of Somalia and its provocative activities in the Oga'dén region of Ethiopia, where many Somali people live; and the beginning of armed resistance in Eritrea by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) necessitated the reorganization and expansion of the army. Somalia, for instance, had begun to amass troops along the border with Ethiopia only a month after its independence.⁴¹

To effectively deal with these problems, a study on the reorganization of the army was submitted in January 1961 and put into effect soon afterward. The study divided the country into four military districts, namely the Central, Northern, Eastern, and Southern Commands. The Central Command

would include Shāwa, Wälläga, and Gojjam. These three provinces would be placed under the First Division. Eritrea, Tigray, Gondär, and Wollo were to be put under the Northern Command or the Second Division. Because of its future enormous challenges, the Eastern Command or the Third Division would be deployed only in Harärgé. The Southern Command or the Fourth Division would maintain law and order in Arsi, Balé, Gamo Gofa, Illubabor, Käfa, and Sidamo.⁴²

In the meantime, troops of the Imperial Bodyguard were dispersed and suspended from active service in the wake of the abortive coup. Those officers who were spared from execution served prison terms. Later, the rank and file were pardoned and assigned to different army units. But in June 1961, many of those who had been stationed in the Ogadén were reported to have deserted out of desperation. At the time, it was feared that such demoralized troops might cross the border into Somalia and disclose military secrets to the Somalis.⁴³

Threats from Somalia and Eritrea

The two most disturbing developments, however, were the flow of Soviet weapons to Somalia and the outbreak of armed resistance in Eritrea. “Ethiopia was caught,” John H. Spencer sums up, “between the upper and the lower jaws of Eritrea and Somalia.”⁴⁴ Taking these problems into consideration, MAAG officials approved the plan of enlarging the army to 28,000 troops (excluding the bodyguard) by 1962.⁴⁵

In view of the growing threat from Somalia, the size of the army was raised to 30,902 in late 1963. The skirmish between the Third Division and guerrillas trained and armed by Somalia in the Ogadén in August and December 1963 was a prelude to Somalia’s full-scale attack. Somalia’s attack on Ethiopian positions in February 1964 was, however, quickly beaten off.⁴⁶

In spite of the easy victory over Somalia, the Ethiopian government did not feel complacent. The continuation of Somalia’s armament program, the intensification of the armed resistance in Eritrea in the second half of the 1960s, the hostile stance of the Sudanese government, and the growing Arab support to the Eritrean insurgents pushed the Ethiopian government to seriously review its defense requirement. In response to that, in 1966, a five-year plan for 1968 to 1972 was worked out to expand the army. According to the plan, the army (including the bodyguard) would be enlarged to 46,531 by 1972. Ethiopian military officials reasoned that the army should far surpass the combined forces of Somalia and Sudan as a precautionary measure to repulse any future simultaneous aggression from the two hostile neighbors. By 1966, the Ethiopian army had reached 38,000, whereas the ground forces of Somalia and Sudan were estimated at 16,000 and 13,000, respectively.⁴⁷ According to a study made in February 1966, Somalia’s army had achieved

supremacy in antitank artillery and superiority in armored weapons. The study thus recommended that Ethiopia should reinforce the Third Division with an infantry brigade, two tank companies, a field artillery with 105mm guns, and an engineering battalion.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the continuous expansion of the army was becoming a heavy drain on the country's economy. Probably aware of this problem, the government decided to introduce compulsory military service. Accordingly, legal experts were assigned to draft a proclamation on the envisaged military service. In addition, a team of five army officers left for Israel, Iran, and Turkey in July 1968 to study the experiences of those countries in the implementation of a compulsory military service program. Upon its return from the study tour, the team suggested a six-month basic military training to be followed by a two-year compulsory service. The team also emphatically noted that the national military service would be "less expensive" than maintaining a large regular army and would enable the government to keep a large reserve force that could be organized into "development corps," or forces that carried out different development activities, such as public projects.⁴⁹

After being examined by military officials, the study was submitted first to the Council of Ministers and then to Parliament in 1970. Although it was decided to begin conscription by 1971,⁵⁰ the government failed to implement the program, probably due to the diminishing American military assistance. While the government was working out plans for the compulsory military service, the Americans made it clear that they had shipped their last military equipment, which included eighteen tanks and four helicopters. More alarmingly, they suggested that to reduce the army to a manageable size, seven combat battalions and the headquarters of three brigades and a division should be dismantled. By then, twenty-seven battalions were engaged in counterinsurgency operations in Eritrea and the Ogadén.

The worst was yet to come. The flow of Soviet weapons to Somalia following the rise to power of Mohamed Siad Barre in 1969 had tremendously increased due to the latter's socialist rhetoric. According to intelligence sources, the Somali troops had already familiarized themselves with the latest Soviet weapons, notably the T-54 and T-55 tanks.⁵¹ A study also indicated that the Ethiopian armored units had already been "outnumbered in quantity, outperformed in quality and out-maneuvered in mobility" by those of Somalia.⁵² The study, therefore, came up with the following recommendations: the replacement of the infantry's obsolete weapons by new equipment, the creation of a mechanized unit in the Ogadén, the establishment of two airborne battalions, the modernization of the artillery units, and the enhancement of the Intelligence Department's capacity and capability.⁵³

Ironically, however, when Ethiopia was in need of increased military assistance, the U.S. government decided to scale down its military aid and phase

out the Qañāw station. By 1973, Ethiopia was no longer a priority for the Americans. While the emperor was desperately looking for new allies, the armed forces removed him from power in 1974.⁵⁴

Training the new army

The training of the first army unit along modern lines was started by Russian émigré officers in 1919. Between 1929 and 1935, the Belgian military mission carried out a more thorough military training. Within half a decade, the training program run by the Belgian officers was well off the ground, comprising instructions in the use of heavy machine guns, antiaircraft weapons, and field artillery. The organization and expansion of the Imperial Bodyguard into infantry, cavalry, and artillery units necessitated the training of Ethiopian officers who would be in command of those army units. To that end, General Eric Virgin, a Swedish military adviser, was entrusted with the planning and realization of a military academy. Based on the recommendation of General Virgin, a team of Swedish officers headed by Captain Viking Tamm arrived at the end of 1934 and established the Holäta Military Academy. According to Virgin's recommendations, out of the sixteen-month training, four months would be allotted for basic courses and the rest would be devoted to specialized training in such areas as artillery, infantry, communications, or military engineering. Soon after its foundation, the military academy began receiving students, mainly from Täfäri Mäkonnen and Menilek II schools.⁵⁵ Despite the interruption of their training by the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935–1936, the cadets fought with gallantry against the Italians and continued the resistance under the Black Lion Organization.⁵⁶

While Ethiopia was still under Italian occupation, the British opened a military training center at Soba camp, in Khartoum, with the intention of producing commanders of guerrilla units in preparation for the war of liberation in Ethiopia against the Italians. The Ethiopian cadets who had been living in Sudan as exiles joined the training program at Soba. Some of the cadets who were to have outstanding careers in the armed forces after 1941 included Abiy Abbäbä, Aman Mikaél Andom, Käbbädä Gäbré, Māngestu Neway, and Šegé Dibu.⁵⁷

Following the successful completion of the war against the Italians in 1941, the Ethiopian government officially asked the British to train and equip the new army. One of the upshots of the Anglo-Ethiopian agreement signed in 1942 was the coming of the British Military Mission to Ethiopia (BMME). The BMME soon began to run a wide range of training programs embracing infantry battalions, cavalry, artillery and armored car regiments, and engineering, signal, and medical corps. The training offered to the infantry battalions included weapons training and mounted infantry courses. While the weap-

ons training course was compulsory for all troops of the army, the training in mounted infantry was given to selected infantrymen. Mounted infantrymen were also required to take courses in animal management lasting two months. Enlisted muleteers were also trained.

The training offered to the artillery included firing practice, and the result was reportedly excellent. Troops of the Armored Car Regiment were also trained in foot drill and in the handling of light and heavy machine guns as well as in car driving and maintenance. In addition to the basic military training, specialized courses were given to engineering, signal, and medical corps.⁵⁸

The BMME was also expected to produce officers for the various units of the army. Accordingly, a Swedish mission reopened the Holäta Military Academy in 1941. But it soon came to be staffed by British officers and NCOs. Initially, students who had completed eighth grade were admitted. Later, NCOs who had served in the army for some time were allowed to join the academy and, upon completion of an abbreviated course, they were made lieutenants.⁵⁹ The training at Holäta included rifle and machine gun handling, map reading, military tactics, sanitation, and first aid. The training was also supported by practice in rifle and machine gun firing and bayonet fighting. Successful cadets were carefully selected for a two-year course similar to that of the Royal Military College of the British Army. By the end of 1942, the number of Ethiopian officers serving in the army had reached 148. The BMME officials were satisfied with the conduct and efficiency of Ethiopian officers.⁶⁰

Filling the arsenal

When it came to equipping the Ethiopian army, the British showed cleverness. They sold weapons (captured from the Italians during the war of liberation) to the Ethiopian army at exorbitant prices. The Ethiopian government was, therefore, forced to limit its purchases to small arms. For instance, in the beginning of 1944, the Ethiopian government rejected the British offer of Sten guns and ammunition on the grounds that the deal amounted to price gouging.⁶¹ When the Ethiopian government approached the United States for arms, the British began to pull the strings. There was much anxiety among British circles when the American officials authorized the supply of field and machine guns to Ethiopia. That consignment became the curtain raiser for future American military assistance to Ethiopia.⁶²

In August 1944, the British Foreign Office learned that the emperor had requested from the American government military supplies “sufficient to equip 45,000 men.” Although the American officials were willing to supply arms only for 5,000 troops, the British seemed determined to stop the consignment of those arms by any means necessary. In the eyes of the British authorities, more weapons in the hands of the Ethiopian army would pose a “potential danger to neighbouring British territories.” When the British failed

to dissuade the Americans, they decided that the American military supplies were “too small to constitute any real danger.”⁶³

In September 1947, the BMME, on behalf of the Ethiopian government, submitted to the War Office a demand for the sale of 10,000 rifles to the Ethiopian army. This time the sale of those rifles was soon approved simply because the British government had discovered that it had 290,000 tons of surplus weapons “of an obsolescent nature” in Egypt. Even to dump those obsolete rifles in Ethiopia, the British War Office made it clear that Ethiopia could only purchase those weapons if it paid in advance.⁶⁴

With regard to this issue, a letter labeled “Top Secret” from the British Legation in Addis Ababa sent to the Foreign Office in September 1947 partly reads:

The Ethiopian Government were anxious to obtain equipment for the Army and Police . . . but that cash payment really was difficult for them since there was practically nothing in the till . . . I was inclined to swallow the usual hard-up story . . . I am bound to admit, however that when the Swedish Chargé d’Affaires told me that the Ethiopian Government had paid about £77,000 spot cash for 16 second hand Swedish B-17 SAAB light bombers, I began to wonder whether we would be justified in giving special and preferential treatment to the Ethiopian government. They leave their army and police practically in rags and starve them of essential equipment and then like . . . children go and indulge [in] an expensive and useless toy.

If the Ethiopians can pay £77,000 down on the nail for some air-planes which they cannot fly . . . they can have no complaint if *we insist on a good fat deposit before we make available for them equipment which they can use and ought to buy* (emphasis added).⁶⁵

The emperor seems to have been dissatisfied with some of the BMME’s activities on the back stage right from the beginning. One source of anxiety was the fact that he could not give orders to the BMME officers. Equally disturbing for the emperor was the reluctance of British officers to accompany Ethiopian army units in military operations. Added to that, at times, there were conflicts between Ethiopian officials and British officers mainly due to what one Ethiopian official called the “intransigent attitude” of the latter. As a result of all these inconveniences, the emperor demanded in the middle of 1943 the withdrawal of the BMME. The emperor’s request came as a bombshell, presumably confounding the British officials.⁶⁶ But after the British were involved in the suppression of the Woyané rebellion in the fall of 1943, the emperor asked the BMME to assume an additional responsibility: the training of the Territorial Army.⁶⁷ Even then, the Ethiopian government was dissatisfied with the British policy of keeping the weapons in the hands of

the army to a minimum. In an attempt to find an alternative source of military assistance, the government turned to the United States. The 1953 Ethiopian-American Mutual Defense Agreement was therefore an outgrowth of Ethiopia's quest for a new arms supplier. The agreement provided that the American Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) would train and equip a total of 18,000 troops of the Ethiopian army.⁶⁸ By 1954, American equipment destined for the Ethiopian army began to arrive. A year after the signing of the Mutual Defense Agreement, Ethiopia received small arms, field artillery, and military vehicles worth \$3,800,000.⁶⁹

Table 1.1. Weapons possessed by the army (September 1958)

Unit	Type and country of origin	Quantity
Infantry	a. Rifles—British, Czechoslovak, Italian, and American	NA
	b. Carbines (American)	500
	c. Machine guns—Italian light machine guns	150
	—Italian heavy machine guns	40
	—American light MGs	300
	d. Mortars—Czechoslovak 83mm	32
	—American 81mm	100
	—American 60mm	300
	e. Wireless—British WS No. 22	40
	—American PRC[portable radio communications]-6	5 sets per company
	—American PRC-10	6 sets per battalion
	—American NGRC[next-generation radio communications]-9	5 sets per brigade
Armor	a. Light tanks (Czechoslovak) (old)	20
	M-24 tanks (American) (new)	5
	b. Armored cars—American M-8 and M-20	28
Artillery	a. Field guns—105mm American	36
	—75mm American	54
	b. Antitank—37mm (old)	12
	c. Heavy mortars—20mm Czechoslovak	12
	—4.2mm American	108

Source: FO371/131270 Armed Forces of Ethiopia, September 1958, 16–17.

After 1953, the old Italian, British, and Czechoslovak rifles were distributed to the police force.

A new military academy

The expansion of the army necessitated the opening of another military academy. The government did not want, however, to leave such responsibility to the Americans. During his official visit to India in 1956, the emperor asked the Indian government for a military mission, which would be in charge of a new military academy. As a result, the Indian military mission arrived in 1957 to establish and run the Harär Military Academy, which eventually became a prestigious officer training institution. The mission prepared twenty-two books to cover the whole military curriculum in a three-year period. Named after the emperor, the academy began to enroll cadets who had completed their secondary education. The first forty cadets began their training in May 1958. The three-year course included training in weapons, military tactics, intelligence and security, field engineering, military law, map reading, military history, and military geography as well as a wide range of academic subjects. Upon completion of training, cadets were expected to start their career as lieutenants. Three successive Indian military missions ran the academy for a decade before handing over the training and administration to Ethiopian officers. Although the academy had no American staff, it received weapons, wireless equipment, and vehicles from MAAG.⁷⁰

Despite that the training of the army was still being carried out by the MAAG, American officials at the Pentagon held up the shipment of arms to Ethiopia in the second half of the 1950s. They explained that Ethiopia had neither the problem of internal security nor the threat of foreign aggression, and hence no need for expanding the armed forces. They also hinted that the armed forces were eating up the country's meager resources. But that explanation was not at all convincing to Ethiopian officials. The imminence of Somalia's independence forced the government to entreat the American authorities to resume the supply of arms. Initially the Americans brushed off Ethiopia's plea for weapons.⁷¹

Help from the Soviets

Cognizant of the Americans' reluctance to satisfy Ethiopia's exigent request for weapons, in 1959, the government appeared to be determined to cast its net wide in search of new suppliers of arms. In the same year, therefore, the emperor turned to the Soviet Union, probably to put pressure on American officials. Meanwhile, the Americans heard rumors of the promise given to Ethiopia by the Soviets with regard to the supply of weapons. At first, Ethiopia's action was viewed as an attempt to blackmail the West and force Americans to accept Ethiopian demands. But it was later discovered that the Soviets had in fact made offers to Ethiopia. The Americans forestalled the

whole project by sending a high-level delegation from the Pentagon to Ethiopia. The delegation was supposed to reevaluate Ethiopia's need for American weapons. Even before the arrival of the delegation, American officials had decided to accept the request of the Ethiopian government so as to keep the Soviets at bay.

Despite such precautionary measures, the Soviets made their appearance in the Horn of Africa by taking Somalia under their wing some years after its independence. The Soviet presence in the Horn seems to have enhanced American commitment to Ethiopia, at least for some time. MAAG thus agreed to train and arm the Fourth Division.⁷²

In late 1961, however, the minister of defense, Märe'd Mängäsha, complained to Brigadier General John Tolson of the U.S. Army about the "inadequate supply of tanks" and light helicopters. Another unpleasant development that occurred in 1963 forced American officials to review the whole military aid package. Intelligence sources warned that the Soviets had agreed to supply Somalia with weapons worth \$80 million, sufficient to arm 20,000 troops. That assistance was likely to upset the military balance in the Horn. In response to this Soviet-Somali accord, the Americans resumed the shipment of armored personnel carriers (APCs), tanks, automatic rifles, flamethrowers, ammunition for heavy weapons, tents, and dry rations.⁷³

The army flexes its muscles

Ethiopia's worst fears were realized when Somalia made an unprovoked attack on Ethiopian border patrols in early 1964. Ethiopian forces came out victorious from the encounter. Victory over Somalia did not, however, bring relief to Ethiopia. Some of the heavy weapons captured from Somalia were either of superior caliber or not yet possessed by the Ethiopian army.⁷⁴ To make matters worse, American military experts who assessed the army's overall capability in 1964 reported that there was a frustrating weakness in the chain of command and in logistics. Other studies also indicated similar shortcomings in the army's mobility and firepower.⁷⁵ In 1966, intelligence reports reconfirmed that Somalia still had overwhelming superiority in heavy weaponry. The imperial government continued to be haunted by such worrying reports and studies right up to the outbreak of the 1974 revolution.⁷⁶

Between 1941 and 1974, the army was involved in the suppression of local rebellions, counterinsurgency operations, and repulsion of aggression as well as international peacekeeping missions. The first engagement that put the army's training to the test was the operation in Gondär against the last remnants of Italian resistance, which was not broken until November 1941. The Italians had entrenched themselves at the strategic passes of Welkefit and Qulquwal Bär (north and south of Gondär, respectively) in an attempt

to hold back the liberation forces.⁷⁷ In that operation, the Second Battalion of the newly organized army, despite its inadequate training, launched an attack on enemy positions that the British officers described with admiration as the “most successful.” What makes that operation exceptional is the fact that the Second Battalion had made an arduous march (covering more than four hundred kilometers from Däbrä Marqos to Gondär) before its engagement. At the same time, a company of the First Battalion showed “great courage and good discipline” when attacked by a band of about five hundred to six hundred “bandits” at Qobbo, northern Wollo. Similarly, in late 1941 and early 1942, other battalions successfully dealt with “banditry” in various parts of the country.⁷⁸

The courage and discipline of the army demonstrated in those operations might have prompted General William Platt (one of the British commanders during the war of liberation) to propose in late 1942 the involvement of 2,500 Ethiopian troops in overseas operations. Since World War II was still raging, the British War Office quickly approved the proposal. After getting the emperor’s consent, the War Office decided to send 2,500 Ethiopian soldiers to the Middle East. Although the British officials were highly embarrassed when two British newspapers disclosed the issue, they went on with the project until it was abandoned altogether in response to the emperor’s request for the withdrawal of the BMME.⁷⁹

The involvement of British officers and pilots in quelling a peasant rebellion in Tigray seems to have sustained the BMME’s association with the army. The 1943 operation against the peasants was preceded by punitive campaigns between January and July 1942 involving the regular troops and the Territorial Army. As the situation worsened, *Ras Abbäbä Arägay*, then the war minister, led a full-scale operation that concluded with the defeat of the rebels and the subsequent capture of Mäqälé in October 1943. The operation proved that the army had become a reliable force, but the territorial troops lacked training and discipline.⁸⁰

For the next two decades, the army was not involved in any major operation within the country. But the Imperial Bodyguard, the emperor’s favorite force, took part in peacekeeping missions in Korea. Driven by the realization that Ethiopia had been a helpless victim of aggression through the failure of collective security, the emperor came to play his own part in international peacekeeping efforts in the early 1950s and 1960s. Following the invasion of South Korea by Communist North Korea in June 1950, Ethiopia sent three battalions in succession to Korea between 1951 and 1954. The First, Second, and Third Qañaw Battalions were put under the command of Lieutenant Colonels Täshomä Ergtäu, Asfaw Andargé, and Woldä Yohannes Sheta, respectively.⁸¹ These battalions were followed by two others sent after the cease-fire. What makes the Ethiopian contribution exceptional is the fact that the

Qañaw troops “never lost an inch of territory which they had occupied. Never did they retreat from enemy’s attacks.”⁸² Nor did they lose a single fighter as prisoner of war.

During the Congo crisis of 1960, too, Ethiopia sent the Täqell Brigade to the Congo to join the United Nations (UN) force there. Named after the emperor’s horse, the Täqell Brigade consisted of four battalions with a total of 2,494 troops.⁸³ Unlike the Korean mission, the responsibility of Ethiopian forces in the Congo was less demanding. The UN force itself was given no definite missions. As a result, there was little or no opportunity for Ethiopian troops to demonstrate the fighting abilities they had exhibited during the Korean War.⁸⁴

Somalia goes to war

After the independence of Somalia in 1960 and the beginning of the Eritrean insurgency in the following year, the Ethiopian government was left with almost no force that could be spared for foreign peacekeeping missions. The relatively peaceful period of the 1950s gave way to the troubled years of the 1960s. Following its independence, Somalia decided to go to war in order to realize its claims over the Ogadén. With Soviet backing, Somalia trained, armed, and deployed insurgents into the Ogadén before and after the 1964 border war. Then, in early February 1964, the Somali army attacked Ethiopian police units stationed at Togochalé, Inäguha (northeast and southeast of Jijiga, respectively), Däbägoryalé (northeast of Awaré), Férfér (southern tip of Harärgé), and Yät and Dollo (both along the Balé southern border). It was on the Togochalé front that Somalia concentrated most of its forces. As a result, an airborne company, an infantry battalion, an artillery battery (with 105mm guns), and a mechanized platoon (with M-24 tanks) were soon sent to Togochalé by Ethiopia to reinforce the police. With close aerial support from the air force, these units began a swift counteroffensive and drove off the invaders fairly quickly. The Somali forces in the southern Ogadén region of Ethiopia were also simultaneously beaten. Somalia was forced to accept a cease-fire, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) passed the Cairo Declaration in July 1964. The declaration required all member states to respect existing boundaries.⁸⁵

Believing that Somalia would sooner or later launch another attack, the Ethiopian military officials prepared in late 1964 a plan named Operation *Mäbräq* (Operation Lightning). Kept in absolute secrecy, the plan underlined the importance of destroying Somali forces and capturing northern Somalia, around Hargeisa, if the Somali government tried to make another attack. Two years later, additional operations called Operation Wall and Operation Bunker were prepared. Both plans outlined the strategies of defending the Ogadén in the event of future aggression from Somalia.⁸⁶ Although Somalia

continued to train and arm insurgents who operated in the Ogadén, it did not get involved in a full-scale war with Ethiopia until 1977.⁸⁷

Eritrea grows restless

While the Third Division was exercising vigilance in the Ogadén, the Second Division was carrying out counterinsurgency operations in Eritrea. Although the ELF began its armed resistance in 1961, its forces in the field were too small to engage the regular troops for some time. It was only in 1964 that the government began to deploy the army. In March 1964, for instance, the minister of defense ordered the commander of the Ground Forces to deploy the army in Eritrea to nip the insurgency in the bud.⁸⁸

Despite some noticeable successes, the early counterinsurgency operation as a whole was characterized by indecisiveness, inefficiency, and inconsistency. The troops sent out to hunt down the guerrillas were usually poorly equipped and too few to carry out a meaningful operation.⁸⁹ In addition, they were left to their own devices, in the words of Shumet Sishagne, “walking barefoot and looking more like a volunteer army rather than a regular force.”⁹⁰ Given such self-defeating acts, one may wonder whether the government was really committed to effectively dealing with the insurgency in Eritrea. There could be no better proof of the deplorable living conditions of the government troops than a “Top Secret” letter sent to Lieutenant General Märe’d Mängäsha (minister of defense) by Lieutenant General Käbbädä Gäbré (chief of staff) in March 1964. The harrowing letter reveals that since the daily ration allowance allotted to soldiers in Eritrea was only 20 cents per head, they were forced to consume stale bread baked by themselves (see Appendix I).⁹¹ Likewise, the paramilitary police (who were often used as a rapid deployment force to reinforce the army) faced similar problems, especially shortage of rations and absence of medical facilities. Even though they shared common problems and carried out coordinated operations, the army and police commanders were at loggerheads with one another.⁹²

In February 1965, during his visit to Eritrea, the emperor was briefed about the main problems of counterinsurgency in that province. It was also suggested to him that the only way to stamp out the insurgency was to train and deploy a special antiguerrilla commando force. But no immediate measure was taken to that effect until it was too late.⁹³

Until 1966, up to three battalions and a company were involved in counterinsurgency operations. By the beginning of 1967, however, due to the intensification of guerrilla activities, the Second Division was forced to deploy all its units. As the guerrillas began to operate in the highlands of Eritrea and inflict considerable damage, mainly through ambushes, the government carried out a series of punitive campaigns against them. Between February and March 1967, various units of the Second Division took part in a campaign

named Operation *Weqaw* (Operation Thrash). The campaign was divided into three phases: Operations *Weqaw* I, II, and III. The overall objective of the campaign was to hunt down guerrillas and punish their supporters, mainly in the western lowlands of Eritrea. The punitive operation was attended by the destruction of property that belonged to the guerrillas and their supporters. As horror-stricken people fled, their villages were set on fire and even their domestic animals were killed. At the end of Operation *Weqaw* II, for instance, the casualties on the guerrillas' side included about 500 head of cattle and 1,800 camels and goats.⁹⁴

The campaign was followed by two other operations called Operation *Mänter* (Weed Out) and Operation *Näbälbal* (Flame). Whereas Operation *Mänter* was conducted in June 1967 to track down the guerrillas around Meš-ewa, Operation *Näbälbal* took place in June–July 1967 with the intention of driving out the Eritrean insurgents from Hamasén, Akalä Guzay, and Särayä. The operations were preceded by a general amnesty to all guerrillas who wanted to submit to the government. The government dropped leaflets, announced the amnesty by megaphones from helicopters, and even sent out local dignitaries to persuade the guerrillas to submit. Nevertheless, only a handful of insurgents went along with the amnesty. Upon the expiry of the deadline that had been set, the government resumed its operations.⁹⁵

In the meantime, other units of the regular force and the Territorial Army were deployed in Balé and Gojjam in the second half of the 1960s. Although the Balé uprising flared up in 1963, it was after 1966 that the government stepped up its military operations. The rebellion was finally crushed in 1970. In Gojjam, the peasant uprising was suppressed in February 1969, a year after its outbreak.⁹⁶

Whereas the rebels in Balé and Gojjam were beaten, the Eritrean guerrillas continued to swell their ranks and receive external support from the Arab world as well as the Communist Bloc. The indiscriminate punitive campaigns only fanned the flames of the insurgency.⁹⁷ It was this problem that baffled government officials such as Asratä Kassa, then the governor of Eritrea. For Asratä, it was hard to explain why the government had failed to wipe out the guerrillas and cut off their supplies. That prompted him to ask an Israeli senior officer to plan an operation that would enable the government to deal effectively with the Eritrean insurgency. The study submitted by the Israeli officer in February 1969 underlined the importance of alienating the guerrillas from the local population by persuasion rather than coercion; closing the border and patrolling the Red Sea coast to dry up the supplies of the guerrillas; bringing peasant hamlets together for security reasons and then carrying out protracted and persistent counterinsurgency operations.⁹⁸

In 1972, the new chief of MAAG, Brigadier General John Collins, submitted his own recommendations to the minister of defense. His study suggested the deployment of highly mobile units to cut off arms supplies to the

guerrillas and restrict their movement by effectively using aerial and naval reconnaissance as well as land surveillance through patrols and checkpoints. In the meantime, he rejected an earlier study by MAAG experts, who had proposed the use of infrared light from helicopters to detect guerrillas at night and wipe them out through a nocturnal operation, fearing that it would be a costly undertaking.⁹⁹

At the height of the counterinsurgency operation in the early 1970s, the emperor resorted to diplomatic maneuvers. In 1971, he persuaded the Chinese government to suspend arms shipment to Eritrean guerrillas in return for Ethiopian recognition of the People's Republic of China. That was followed in 1972 by an understanding with the Sudanese president, who agreed to deny Eritrean guerrillas any support in exchange for Ethiopia's pledge to suspend assistance to southern Sudanese rebels.¹⁰⁰

During those diplomatic ploys, the government launched a series of counterinsurgency operations in Eritrea. Between April 1971 and January 1973, the army carried out no less than ten military operations. The major ones were named Operations *Adwa* (carried out in May 1971), *Asamenäw* (Convince Him, June 1971), *Qäsqs* (Agitate, December 1971), *Qonter* (Grip, April 1972), *Gebaw* (Plunge, July 1972), and *Dämses* (Annihilate, January 1973).¹⁰¹

In 1974, the army that had been waging counterinsurgency operations for more than a decade turned against the government itself and that led to the demise of the imperial regime.

CHAPTER TWO

The Army Expands (1977–1991)

Between 1974 and 1991, the army grew from about 46,000 to nearly half a million. Since the number of young people who had voluntarily enlisted in the army was far lower than the required quota, the government often resorted to forceful conscription. In the meantime, new training centers were set up to accommodate the ever-growing number of recruits. In the late 1980s, the overall accommodation capacity of the training centers was raised to 100,000 recruits.¹

The enormous expansion of the army was to be accompanied by a constant flow of arms. Once the government successfully replaced the United States with the Soviet Union in 1977 as the major supplier of weapons, it did not face a shortage of arms until the late 1980s. But as the Cold War era came to a close, the new Soviet leaders squeezed the massive flow of arms to a trickle, and the Därg had to look for new suppliers of weaponry. The acquisition of weapons from new suppliers did not, however, help the Därg in turning the table against the northern insurgents. The fall of Afabét into EPLF hands in 1988 was followed by the loss of successive battles that led to the total collapse of the army in 1991.²

Unrest in the provinces

A year after its seizure of power, the Därg faced armed opposition in nine of the fourteen provinces. In Eritrea, the northernmost province of Ethiopia, the two guerrilla groups, the EPLF and ELF, renewed their insurgency in January 1975 in and around Asmära. In Tigray, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), founded in 1975, took up arms against the new military government. Likewise, the Afar Liberation Front (ALF), which had emerged in the same year, began to ambush trucks along the Assäb-Addis Ababa road. In northwestern Gondär, the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), formed in early 1975, began armed resistance and took control of two frontier towns: Humära and Mätämma. In South Gondär, a former *awraja* secretary named Admasu Bälay rallied the peasants of the region behind him and took control

of Däbrä Tabor. Similarly, feudal lords and former officials of the imperial government raised the standard of rebellion against the Därg in Gojjam, Wollo, and northern Shäwa soon after the March 1975 rural land proclamation that broke up the huge estates owned by the nobility and transferred ownership to the government. Later in the year, Somali guerrillas, armed by the Somali government in Mogadishu, began to operate in Harärgé, Balé, and Sidamo.³

Confronted with these enormous challenges, the new military leaders decided to organize a well-trained and highly effective antiguerrilla force named Näbälbal (Flame). To that effect, the necessary budget was allocated, the recruitment criteria were set, the training program was outlined, and the commanders were appointed. Meanwhile, the Därg managed to persuade the Israelis to train and equip the new force. According to the selection criteria, the recruits had to be bachelors aged between twenty-two and thirty, physically strong, spirited, and capable of speaking the national language, Amharic. In addition, they were expected to have a strong feeling of nationalism and identification with the broad masses and be able to keep the secrets of their unit.⁴ Most of the recruits were drawn from the Second Division based in Eritrea. They were organized into ten battalions, each with four hundred men. Officers, carefully handpicked from the airborne unit, were assigned as commanders of those ten battalions. Likewise, NCOs were given positions from the squad to the platoon level. The whole Näbälbal force was put under the leadership of Colonel (later Major General) Alämayähu Dästa and Colonel (later Major General) Asrat Berru, who were appointed as commander and deputy commander.⁵

Once commanders were assigned and recruits organized into battalions, Israeli officers began the training in counterinsurgency operations toward the end of 1975. Commanders and recruits were trained separately. The 4,000 recruits grouped into ten battalions were sent to four training centers: three battalions to Awash Arba, three to Däbrä Zäyet, two to Fenché, and the remaining two to Sänqälé, near Ambo. The eight-month training aimed at producing a highly mobile antiguerrilla force that could carry out counterinsurgency operations with small arms. The recruits were given intensive training in the use of small arms (mainly automatic assault rifles, hand grenades, machine guns, light mortars, and antitank guns) during both offensive and defensive operations. The main tactics taught were mounting surprise attacks, ambushing guerrillas in various ways, infiltrating deep into guerrilla territory and kidnapping insurgents, searching for guerrilla fighters in villages and forests, carrying out urban operations, and frisking people at checkpoints. The recruits were also trained to carry out seaborne and helicopter operations, travel long distances on foot, and survive for an extended time in deserts and forests. To get the best results, 70 percent of the training was practical and the remaining 30 percent devoted to theoretical instruction.⁶

Having gone through such a rigorous training, the Nābālbāl troops were awarded their certificates in July 1976 by Māngestu H. Maryam (often spelled Mengistu H. Mariam), then a powerful member of the Dārg and later the president of Ethiopia. The ten Nābālbāl battalions that completed training were given consecutive identification numbers from 201 to 210. With the exception of the 201st Battalion, which was deployed to Diré Dawa, the rest ended up in Eritrea.⁷

As a result of the escalation of the insurgency in Eritrea and the growing threat from Somalia, the government recruited and trained the second batch of ten battalions (211th to 220th) in late 1976. Just after completing their training, the 216th and 219th Battalions were deployed in Harārgé, and the other eight battalions were sent to Eritrea.⁸

In 1977, the Nābālbāl troops deployed in both Eritrea and Harārgé entered battle. As expected, their rigorous training in counterinsurgency operations paid off. Those rushed to Diré Dawa, along with the militia, saved the town from falling into Somali hands. Similarly, their fellow soldiers in Eritrea fought bitterly to keep the besieged towns in government hands.⁹

The peasant army

The Nābālbāl force was not the only unit organized during the early revolutionary years. Once Ethiopian intelligence sources discovered Somalia's preparation to wage a full-scale war against Ethiopia, the Dārg decided to raise a militia force as quickly as possible. In early 1977, the Dārg, therefore, issued a hasty recruitment program. The peasant associations created in 1975 following the land proclamation now proved crucially important in recruiting peasants. Each peasant association was instructed to recruit as many small landowners and farmworkers as possible to attain the national total of 300,000 men.¹⁰

Throughout the centuries, Ethiopian peasants had been effectively mobilized for the recurrent civil wars and in defense of the country against external aggression. But the situation in 1977 was so hectic that peasant associations began conscripting agricultural laborers without doing sufficient mobilization. In his memoirs, the long-time commander of the famed Sānteq Mechanized Brigade, Brigadier General Kasayé Chāmāda, for instance, recollects a tragic conscription incident: "While a peasant was putting his harvested and thrashed grain into a sack, peasant association leaders arrived and told him to get ready. Since he had no time to take it home, he left behind his grain with his small child. Sadly, that same peasant died in a certain battle."¹¹ Conversely, there were peasants who dutifully responded to the national call to arms and made themselves readily available for recruitment. For them, the revolution, which had already made them owners of land, was worth defending from external aggression.¹²

The number of peasants hastily conscripted was less than half of the original target. For the first round of training, 70,500 men were recruited from all over the country. They were organized into thirty militia brigades and camped at a place called Segä Méda, renamed Tatäq ("get armed"). Segä Méda, a sleepy grazing field near Addis Ababa, was transformed into a busy training center. Thousands of tents were gathered from the *eders* (self-help associations) of Addis Ababa and pitched to shelter the recruits. Providing food for the large number of recruits was difficult and was marked by mealtime stampedes.¹³

Despite serious accommodation difficulties, the Därg somehow managed to start off the training by bringing Cuban instructors and Ethiopian interpreters. Since the military situation in Eritrea and the Ogadén was absolutely critical, extended training was out of the question. The Cuban instructors were thus asked to employ a crash program of basic military training for a period of three months. The first few weeks were devoted to drilling exercises. The Cuban drilling instructions (that required recruits to goose step in Communist army styles) were so popular at the time that young boys (myself included) used to imitate them on the playground. The training mainly focused on weapons familiarization, the employment of offensive and defensive tactics, and political indoctrination.¹⁴

By the end of the third month, thirty militia brigades with a total of 70,500 men completed their training and paraded through the Addis Ababa Revolution Square (now Mäsqäl Square) on June 25, 1977. Most of them were soon deployed in the Ogadén, while the rest were sent to the northern front.¹⁵

Recruitment for the second round of militia training began in September 1977. This time the target was to train 52,000 men.¹⁶ Within just a year, the government trained sixty-one militia brigades with a total of 143,350 men, almost half of the original target.¹⁷

Battling Somalia and the Eritrean rebels

Although the government rushed most of the first batch of the militia units to the Ogadén, Somali forces continued to overrun Ethiopian defenses. The fall of Jijiga into Somali hands in September 1977 and the Somali assault on Diré Dawa and Harär moved the Därg to decide that an effective army unit should be quickly raised to beat off the invaders within a short time. Accordingly, young people were hastily recruited from all over the country to organize three paracommando brigades. The recruits were to be unmarried young men aged eighteen to twenty-five with height of 165 centimeters and above. With respect to educational background, they were required to be sixth graders or above.¹⁸

The training of the First, Second, and the Third Paracommando Brigades began in August 1977 at three centers: Lägädadi (near Addis Ababa), Awash

Arba, and Awasa (now Hawassa). Originally, the training program was designed for a year. Nevertheless, as the Somali forces reached the outskirts of Harär on November 23, 1977, in a bold thrust to take the town, all the paracommando brigades were rushed to Harär. Although their training did not yet go beyond weapons familiarization and target practices, they saved Harär from falling into Somali hands by beating off the invaders.¹⁹

The paracommando brigades stayed on the same front until the defeat of Somalia in March 1978 and then were transferred to Eritrea. They took part in the 1978–1979 counteroffensive against the Eritrean insurgents. Although the army regained most of Eritrea within a relatively short time, it failed to storm Naqfa (also spelled Nakfa), a town in the Sahel Mountains that was the last stronghold of the insurgents, in July 1979. At this point, the government turned to the Soviets for advice and equipment. In response, the Soviet military advisers are said to have advised Mängestu that his government should organize mountain infantry rangers specially trained in mountain warfare to carry out a successful counterinsurgency operation and to capture Naqfa. The Soviets agreed to settle the bill for training and equipping four mountain infantry divisions.²⁰

As part of the preparation, Mängestu instructed the Ministry of National Defense to set up a team to design an effective training program, study ways of getting the required manpower, and open new training centers.²¹ The Ministry of National Defense, however, found it quite difficult to train four mountain infantry divisions at the time owing to recruitment and accommodation problems. It was thus decided to recruit and train the first two divisions and later continue with the other two. The recruitment targeted mainly high school students. The minimum requirements in terms of height and weight were 165 centimeters and 50 kilograms, respectively. Besides, recruits had to be single, aged eighteen to twenty-five, and had to have completed eighth grade.²²

Recruitment was conducted smoothly on a voluntary basis throughout the country. The recruits were soon gathered at Tatäq and organized into two divisions named the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth Mountain Infantry Divisions (MIDs), each with four brigades. While the Thirty-Fifth, Thirty-Sixth, Thirty-Seventh, and Thirty-Eighth Brigades belonged to the Eighteenth MID, the Thirty-Ninth, Fortieth, Forty-First, and Forty-Second Brigades were put under the Nineteenth MID.²³

Training began in November 1979. The first four months were devoted to basic training, including weapons familiarization and target practice. At the end of the fourth month, all the recruits were moved to Hurso, near Diré Dawa, for specialized training in mountain warfare. There, the recruits were trained in various offensive and defensive tactics with strong emphasis on practical application. The training at Hurso lasted for six months. The mountain rangers completed the ten-month intensive training in August 1980.²⁴

Days after the end of their training, the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth MIDs were deployed in Tigray and the Ogadén, respectively. Probably because of their voluntary recruitment and effective training, the mountain infantrymen were highly motivated and very eager to get involved in actual combat. One of them who served in the Nineteenth MID recounts: "Nobody thought [of the possibility] of being killed by the enemy. The mood and morale were such that the young soldiers forget [the fact] that the enemy also had training and was armed with deadly weapons."²⁵

On its part, the government was also eager to see the result of its special training program. No sooner had the Nineteenth MID arrived in the Ogadén than the Eastern Command launched a campaign known as Operation Lash. Divided into four stages, the operation aimed at putting an end to guerrilla activities in the Ogadén by driving out insurgents from all Ethiopian territory. During the first stage, Ethiopian troops swept through the frontier areas between the Ethiopia-Djibouti border to Enägotha and set up defense lines along the boundary with Somalia. In the second stage of the operation, various army units hunted down guerrillas by moving from the highlands of Harärgé all the way down to Dägähabur. By the time the third stage of the operation was launched, most of the guerrillas were on the run and the army met little or no resistance around Wardér, Qäbri Dähar, and Godé. The final stage was carried out between November 25 and December 5, 1980. The army finally succeeded in marching as far as the international boundary and controlling Gäladin, Mustahil, Férfér, Boh, Burkur, Dägob, and Shelabo. During Operation Lash, the Nineteenth MID proved its effectiveness and reliability.²⁶

Likewise, the Eighteenth MID deployed to Sheré and carried out a successful counterinsurgency operation under the leadership of its able commander, Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Märdasa Lélisa. The operation began in late August 1980 and continued until early 1981. Once the division opened up the Gondär-Sheré road, it based itself in Sheré and deployed its two brigades (the Thirty-Fifth and the Thirty-Seventh) to TPLF base areas. Between February 13 and 23, 1981, the two brigades swept through the heart of TPLF base areas, particularly Sheraro, Dädäbit, Aşärga, and Addi Da'ero. They captured the training camp, the arms depot, the medical center, and the prison of the TPLF at Sur. That was another proof of the effectiveness of rigorous training.²⁷

Satisfied with the successful operation carried out by the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth MIDs, the government began to implement a program named "Project 73." The project aimed at recruiting and training two other MIDs: the Twenty-First and the Twenty-Second. By the beginning of 1981, recruitment was underway. Both divisions could not, however, start training simultaneously because the number of recruits who were to be put under the Twenty-Second MID fell short. While recruitment continued for the Twenty-Second MID, the four brigades of the Twenty-First MID (the Forty-Fourth,

Forty-Fifth, Forty-Sixth, and Forty-Seventh) began training in early April 1981 at Tatäq. Once the target number was achieved, the Twenty-Second MID, made up of the Forty-Eighth, Forty-Ninth, Fiftieth, and Fifty-First Brigades, commenced training in the beginning of June 1981. While the two MIDs were being trained, the preparation for the huge Operation Red Star was in full swing. Due to the urgency of the military situation, the Twenty-First and the Twenty-Second MIDs could not go through the intensive ten-month training as their predecessors had done a year earlier. The government, therefore, shortened the training time to six months: four months of basic training followed by two months of joint military exercise.²⁸

The brevity of the training period was soon evident in the poor performance of the Twenty-First and the Twenty-Second MIDs during Operation Red Star. The two divisions were rushed into battle without an earlier experience with less challenging operations. To the complete dismay of the government, the Twenty-First MID deployed on the Kärkäbät front succumbed within days as a result of the EPLF counteroffensive and a critical shortage of water. Mängestu's claim that the disaster on the Kärkäbät front led to the failure of the whole Operation Red Star is corroborated by Brigadier General Wubätu Şäggayé, the commander of the Nadäw Command, and Major General Märdasa Lélisa, commander of the Eighteenth MID.²⁹ The collapse of the army on the Kärkäbät front enabled the EPLF to transfer its fighters from that front to Naqfa and to halt the advance of the Third and the Seventeenth Divisions, which had managed to come close to taking the last stronghold of the Eritrean insurgents.³⁰

The war in the air

A year earlier, before the failure of Operation Red Star, the government had decided to organize a new airborne unit as the country's strategic force. In 1976 and 1977, as a result of a mutiny at Däbrä Zäyet and Asmära, the Därg had disbanded the Airborne Brigade and dispersed the paratroopers to various army units.³¹ But the escalation of the war in Eritrea forced the Därg to organize and train airborne troops along new lines. As usual, the Soviets were asked for advice. They suggested that the recruits should either be sent to the Soviet Union or the entire training equipment and the training staff should be brought from the U.S.S.R. They also insisted that the instruction materials brought from Israel and the American-made parachutes stored at Däbrä Zäyet should be burned and replaced by Soviet equipment. The cost of training calculated by the Soviet advisers was so staggering that the government decided to conduct it locally with available materials. Colonel (later Brigadier General) Täsfayé H. Maryam (who led a courageous airborne operation in 1976 to rescue the besieged infantrymen at Naqfa) was instructed to do everything possible to train the airborne unit.³²

Recruitment began in early July 1981. According to the selection criteria set, recruits were required to be eighth graders or above, with ages of eighteen to twenty-three and a height of 160 centimeters or above. Hospitals throughout the country were ordered to carefully screen the recruits through various examinations. Recruits had, for instance, to be free from abnormal spinal curvatures such as scoliosis (lateral curvature of the spinal column), kyphosis (curvature of the rib-bearing thoracic spine), and lordosis (curvature of the neck and lower back). In addition, any symptom of hemorrhoids, varicose veins, sexually transmitted diseases, leprosy, or sight or hearing defects could render a recruit unfit.³³

Recruits who passed all those examinations formed the Fifth Airborne Brigade and were taken to Däbrä Zäyet and Awasa for training. Since the training and lodging facilities at Däbrä Zäyet could only accommodate a battalion, training was to be conducted on a shift basis. Those recruits who completed their parachute exercises at Däbrä Zäyet were taken to Awasa for additional instruction, and those who underwent some basic training at Awasa were brought to Däbrä Zäyet. The training program had three components: basic infantry, commando training, and parachute exercise. The recruits completed their training after eighteen months in March 1983. They then successfully hunted down guerrillas in Balé and the Afar lowlands along the Addis Ababa-Assäb road before being deployed in Eritrea. The brigade soon proved itself to be one of the most motivated and distinguished army units.³⁴

Encouraged by the effectiveness of the airborne troops, the government decided to raise the brigade to a division level by training three more brigades. But the government found it difficult to get enough recruits for the three brigades. It solved the problem by recruiting those who could read and write from the people's militia gathered for training at Tatäq. Once the recruits formed the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Brigades, they were given airborne training for a year at Däbrä Zäyet and Asmära. With the completion of the training, the 102nd Airborne Division was born in August 1985 and was stationed in Eritrea as a strategic force.³⁵

Resorting to a draft

Despite the organization and deployment of various army units, the war in northern Ethiopia continued to escalate. On the other hand, the army had been suffering from frustrating manpower depletion since 1977. As a possible solution, the government had been entertaining the idea of a national military service as early as 1979. In his letter to the Ministry of National Defense sent in August 1979, Mängestu had, for instance, raised the necessity of designing training programs for the future recruits of the National Military Service (NMS) (see Appendix II).³⁶

The Därg did not need to make a thorough study on the introduction and

implementation of the NMS. It only had to put into effect a study conducted and approved by the Ethiopian Parliament in 1970 (see Chapter One). Having reactivated the 1970 study, the government thus issued the NMS proclamation in May 1983. In line with the proposal outlined in the old study, the proclamation required all citizens aged eighteen to fifty to go through a six-month training to be followed by an active service for two years.³⁷ To implement the NMS, the government formed two parallel bodies: the Military Commissariat (MC) under the Ministry of Interior and the National Military Service and Civil Defense Department (NMSCDD) under the Ministry of National Defense. While the MC was put in charge of all recruitment activities, the NMSCDD was responsible for training and deploying national servicemen.³⁸

The government then embarked on the construction of four new training centers at Tollay (in Käfa), Däddesa (Wälläga), Mäso (Balé), and Ber Shäläqo (Gojjam). These centers were respectively named from Tatäq 2 to Tatäq 5, the original militia training center of Tatäq being number one. Although the total accommodation capacity of the five training centers was 100,000 men, the government could never achieve that target owing to shortfalls in recruitment.³⁹ Once the training centers became ready, the government carried out the first round of recruitment between March 24 and April 12, 1984. Then training took place in all the five centers between April and September 1984. Out of the planned 50,012 recruits, 43,766 national servicemen successfully completed their training and entered active service for the next two years.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, training centers began to send alarming reports right from the beginning. As early as May 1984, a total of 3,185 draftees were reported to have deserted their training centers. Out of these, 385 conscripts were arrested and sent back to their respective training centers. By the time they were brought back to the training camps, they had already lost their uniforms and missed a portion of the instruction. The NMSCDD had to issue them new uniforms and arrange crash training programs.⁴¹ Despite such problems, the government continued to draft young men for the second round of the NMS. The second round of conscription took place between December 25, 1984, and January 9, 1985. Training was then given to 38,949 national servicemen in the five training centers. The second-round national servicemen remained in active service between June 1985 and July 1987.⁴²

As the government resorted to forceful conscription, it faced growing opposition from the public. Since the government stifled open protest, the public responded unfavorably to conscription in various ways. Bahru describes the situation: “Those who could afford it dispatched their offspring to safe havens abroad, albeit sometimes at a tender age. Those who could not, sought hiding places for their children until the wave passed.”⁴³ At times, opposition from parents and conscripts took dramatic forms. One mother, for instance, is said to have lain flat on the road to prevent a bus from taking her son to a training

camp. Draftees are reported to have died while jumping from vehicles in an attempt to escape. Others trekked for weeks to cross the border into Kenya and Sudan, and a few are said to have been devoured by wild animals.⁴⁴ In spite of such unequivocal opposition from the public, the government went on with its conscription program. Whether the 1984 census was primarily motivated by the NMS has to be investigated. At any rate, it helped the government to fix a quota of recruits for each administrative region. In early 1986, the government tried to draft 1 percent of each administrative region's population to raise 30,000 conscripts for the third round of the NMS. However, the government could train 28,363 conscripts for the third round of the NMS, to be followed a year later by the training of 38,250 draftees for the fourth round.⁴⁵

Table 2.1. Quota of conscription (1986)

Administrative region	Planned quota	Modified quota	Reserve
Addis Ababa	1,400	2,000	400
Arsi	1,200	1,500	350
Assäb	100	100	20
Balé	900	1,000	200
Eritrea	2,500	3,000	600
Gamu Gofa	1,100	500	100
Gojjam	2,200	3,000	600
Gondär	2,200	3,000	600
Harärgé	3,300	2,000	400
Illubabor	900	500	100
Käfa	1,700	2,000	400
Shäwa	5,300	6,000	1,200
Sidamo	3,000	2,000	400
Tigray	2,300	3,000	600
Wälläga	2,100	1,000	200
Wollo	2,800	3,000	600
Total	33,000	33,600	6,770

Source: MOND, Administration 137, *Ya 30,000 Melmeloch ya ya Keflä Hagäru Kota*
[Each Administrative Region's Quota for 30,000 Recruits], 1978 E.C., 1.

With respect to the training package, the NMSCDD prepared a comprehensive schedule for six months. Table 2.2 shows a training schedule prepared for the third-round national servicemen.

Table 2.2: NMS training schedule for six months (1986)

Type of training	Allotted time in hours		
	Daytime	Nighttime	Total
Political indoctrination	100	30	130
Military security	16	-	16
Development work	40	-	40
General military education	267	18	285
Weapons familiarization and target practice	259	74	333
Military tactics	211	106	317
Tactical combat practice	165	90	255
Out of camp practice	28	24	52
Examination	24	-	24
Commander's time of briefing	12	-	12
Preparation time	16	-	16
Public holidays	16	-	16
Total	1,154	342	1,496

Source: MOND, Operations 773, *La Sostāñña Zur Seltāna Yatāzāgajā Ya Temherh Program* [A Training Program Prepared for the Third-Round NMS], 1–2.

Although the training program was painstakingly prepared, conscripts were usually indifferent to it. Their indifference stemmed mainly from their belief that they would not stay in the army and did not want to take the training seriously. Instead, they eagerly waited for the time of their demobilization.⁴⁶

In accordance with the NMS proclamation, the first- and second-round national servicemen were demobilized in October 1986 and July 1987, respectively, and allowed to return to civilian life after thirty months of training and active service. But they were still required to join the army during times of national emergency. Following the fall of Afabét into EPLF hands, the government called up the first- and second-round NMS reservists.⁴⁷

Training commandos

The implementation of the NMS did not interrupt the training of regular units. Since 1975, the government had been conducting two different types of training programs. One of these aimed at boosting the numerical superiority of the army; the training period for this objective was as short as three months. The other focused on quality and produced famed units such as the Nābābal, the paracommando, the mountain infantry, and the airborne troops. In

1987, the government was determined to produce an intensively trained and highly motivated force named the 103rd Commando Division. The division was planned to include 10,000 fighters, and it was to be headquartered in Baher Dar. Colonel Gétahun W. Giorgis was appointed as commander of the Commando Division, and he selected able officers as his staff.⁴⁸

The training program had two parts: a six-month basic infantry training to be followed by a one-year commando training. Once recruitment was over, training began on January 13, 1987, at the Harär Military Academy. Having completed the basic military training, the recruits were moved to Hurso, Wondo Tiqua (near Awasa), and Baher Dar for commando training.⁴⁹

The training of the Commando Division was not, however, smooth. According to a staff officer in the 103rd Commando Division, senior officers who later staged the 1989 abortive coup were allegedly sabotaging behind the scene to demoralize the recruits. They, for instance, withheld the delivery of rations, medical supplies, uniforms, and training materials. He further claims that not only did they deploy the commandos to Tigray in March 1988 by suspending the training but also they dispersed some of them to Eritrea.⁵⁰

Several retired officers corroborate this claim. These informants concur that the senior officers who led the 1989 attempted coup were making a number of secret plans to weaken eminent army units. The 103rd Commando Division was, thus, a victim of such sabotage. On the surface, interrupting training programs and rushing recruits to battles seems a natural response during emergency situations. But when viewed from another angle, it may be regarded as a deliberate attempt to incapacitate troops who could have been better fighters if allowed to complete their training. At any rate, the 103rd Commando Division suffered heavy casualties in February 1989 at the Battle of Sheré.⁵¹

Some six months before the Sheré disaster, the government once again began to recruit young men to train special commando brigades (SCBs). The program was known as “Spartakiad–81.” While 81 indicates the Ethiopian year of 1981, when the SCBs were organized, the name Spartakiad (Sparta for short) was borrowed from the Soviets.⁵² Though not frequently used, the SCBs were given an Ethiopian name, *Qeltuf* (*swift* in Ge’ez). According to the project document, the Sparta force was the first of its kind in the country: the complexity of the training, the weapons, and the operations to be carried out were planned to be quite different from previous undertakings.⁵³

The government was ambitious. The training program was designed with the goal that one Sparta commando could wipe out one hundred insurgents with guns and ten to twelve guerrillas by simply throwing special daggers.⁵⁴ The set criteria required recruits to be between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, to have completed grade ten, and to belong to the Revolutionary Ethiopia Youth Association (REYA). It was also highly preferred if recruits had earlier airborne training, great interest in sports, and proficiency in other languages in addition to their own.⁵⁵

Once 7,830 young men were recruited for the first three Sparta brigades, training began in November 1988 at Tatäq-II (Tollay) by North Korean instructors code-named “Comrades 012.” Training included practicing various combat tactics, the use of silent weapons, swimming, boat sailing, jumping from a tower, descending from helicopters, and evasion and survival tactics.⁵⁶

Table 2.3. Special commando (Sparta) training program (1986)

Type of training	Allotted time in hours		
	<i>Daytime</i>	<i>Nighttime</i>	<i>Total</i>
Political indoctrination	100	-	100
Military tactics	240	160	400
Target practice	170	40	210
General military education	267	18	285
Physical exercise and self-defense	300	-	300
Engineering practices	36	4	40
Map reading	30	10	40
Contingency	130	-	130
Total	1,273	232	1,505

Source: MOND, Administration 5820, *Selä Spartakiad Seltäna Yäqäräbä Eqed* [A Plan Submitted About Spartakiad Training], 1–2.

While the first three Sparta brigades (identified as the 1/81/1, 1/81/2, and 1/81/3 to indicate the units of the first batch trained in the year 1981 E.C. — that is, 1981 on the Ethiopian calendar or 1988 on the European and American calendar) were still being trained at Tollay, the second batch started training at Däddessa in June 1989. Though it usually failed to achieve targets, the government planned to raise the total number of the second batch to 9,000. Among these, the Däddesa, Mäslo, and Ber Shäläqo training centers were expected to receive 4,000, 3,000, and 2,000 recruits, respectively. But the government could only train 6,300 Sparta commandos for the second batch, and they were named 2/81/1, 2/81/2, and 2/81/3.⁵⁷

In a matter of two years, the government trained five batches of fifteen Sparta brigades with a total of 31,295 men. Among these, two brigades were merged with the 102nd Airborne Division; and another brigade was dispersed and incorporated into other army units that faced serious manpower depletion. Of the remaining twelve brigades, eight were sent to Eritrea and four were put under the Third Revolutionary Army (TRA). As a matter of fact, with the exception of 3/82/1, the Sparta brigades were thrown into battles before completing their ten-month training.⁵⁸

Despite the deployment of the Sparta brigades to various units, the government continued to lose battles. As insurgents opposed to Ethiopia's military government launched offensives in South Gondär and South Wollo in October 1989, the government decided to draft a huge number of people to the regular army. In a letter dated October 20, 1989, the president ordered Lieutenant General Addis Tädla, the new chief of staff, to recruit 100,000 men for the regular army, build new training centers, continue the Sparta training at Däddésa, organize two new airborne divisions with a total of 20,000 men, and make instructors and materials available for training.⁵⁹

After weeks of recruitment, the government managed to draft 70,333 men, out of whom 6,436 recruits were later discharged as unfit. The remaining 63,897 conscripts started training at six training centers in early 1991. The six centers were Tollay (8,811 recruits), Däddésa (11,815), Mäslo (13,823), Ber Shäläqo (20,259), Belatté (15,147), and Milbana (between Yabélo and Mégga along the Addis Ababa-Moyalé road) (478).⁶⁰

With respect to the two new airborne divisions, Mängestu is said to have asked the North Koreans for assistance, but they declined. Then the Israelis were approached. They, too, were reluctant to provide assistance. As a last resort, Mängestu instructed Brigadier General Täsfayé H. Maryam to train the planned two airborne divisions at Belatté. These were named the 204th and 205th Airborne Divisions, and the recruits were given training for a few months before being thrown to the Ambo front in the last days of the military government in 1991. In the meantime, the government deployed three other hastily trained Sparta brigades (identified as the 6/83/1, 6/83/2, and 6/83/3) with a total of 6,692 commandos to the Jimma, Ambo, and Fincha fronts. That deployment raised the total number of Sparta commandos trained in six batches to 37,987.⁶¹

Officer training

Side by side with the regular infantry and specialized training units at the private level, the government was also producing NCOs and officers. The military government inherited the Holäta and the Harär Military Academies from the imperial regime. After 1977, the Därg eliminated the prestigious status that the Harär Military Academy had been given and put the two officer training schools on an equal footing.⁶² Both institutions admitted voluntarily recruited high school graduates and trained them for twelve months in military science. Since the existing colleges and universities admitted only a small portion of the high school graduates, the Därg had no problem attracting young men into the officer training centers. In addition to the common courses on military science, the two academies offered specialized courses for the infantry, armored, artillery, engineering, and signal officers. Upon completion of their training, the trainees were commissioned as second lieutenants.⁶³

However, the capacity of the two academies was so limited that the gov-

ernment could not produce officers fast enough. As a result, the army suffered from a critical shortage of officers. In September 1985, for instance, there was a shortfall of 18,000 officers. The lack of officers was so critical that the government decided to recruit those who performed well in their three-month training as national servicemen, give an entrance examination, and train them as platoon commanders at Hurso for six months. By so doing, the government planned to produce 3,000 platoon commanders per year. Even then, the shortage of officers could not be solved within a short time.⁶⁴

The other method of combating the problem was to recruit from among the militia and regular army those who had a good record of serving as junior commanders at the squad or platoon level and train them as officers at Harär, Holäta, and Hurso. But this recruitment and training process was not without problems. Those who came from the army and had long experience as infantrymen were taught the basics of military science with those who came from high schools with no experience at all. The former, therefore, were taught what they already knew, and for them it was a waste of time. To make matters worse, during emergency situations, they were sent back to their units and appointed as battalion or brigade commanders without taking specialized courses in military leadership.⁶⁵

Infantrymen who were sent for officer training were recruited from various army units on a quota basis. In April 1990, for instance, the Second Revolutionary Army (SRA) based in Eritrea was ordered to recruit 2,000 NCOs to be trained at Holäta as brigade commanders. Commanders above the brigade level were sent to the Soviet Union for training.⁶⁶

The Harär, Holäta, and Hurso schools were meant for the training of NCOs and junior officers. In 1985, the government established the Armed Forces Staff Academy at Bélla in Addis Ababa for senior officers. There, advanced military science courses were offered to colonels and generals for twelve months. In April 1986, the government redesigned the curriculum of the staff academy with the help of Soviet military advisers. Instead of a one-year training period, the academy was to give postgraduate courses on local, continental, and global strategy; geopolitics; and defense management, and senior officers would be given a one-month intensive training focusing on joint strategic military leadership. That plan was soon put into effect, and senior officers took turns in short-term training at the Bélla Staff Academy.⁶⁷

Choosing an arms supplier

Since 1953, the Ethiopian army had been heavily dependent on American weaponry. The Ethiopian-American defense agreement signed in 1953 was supposed to last twenty-five years. Although the strategic importance of the Qañāw station had already started to decline since the early 1970s, the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution in 1974 did not bring about immedi-

ate reverses in Ethiopian-American relations. Despite its socialist rhetoric, the Därg seems to have realized that it would be unwise to stop the flow of American weapons by severing its relations with Washington. Two years later, however, Ethiopian-American relations began to sour. In November 1976, the U.S. Congress made it clear that Ethiopia was no longer entitled to receive American military assistance because of the Därg's gross violations of human rights. As a follow-up to that decision, on April 22, 1977, the new Jimmy Carter administration told the Ethiopian government that it would reduce the number of MAAG staff by half and shut down the Qañāw station altogether in September, eight months before the expiry of the twenty-five-year defense agreement. That announcement precipitated retaliatory measures. Within twenty-four hours, the Därg took its own preemptive actions. Accordingly, it announced the abrogation of the 1953 defense agreement and the closure of not only the Qañāw station but also all offices of MAAG, the U.S. Information Service, the U.S. consulate general in Asmāra, and the Naval Medical Research Center. A week later, outraged by the Därg's action, Washington canceled a total of \$16 million (which had been earmarked for credit and military aid) and stopped the shipment of weapons worth \$100 million.⁶⁸

According to a former Därg official, the U.S. government "refused to deliver even the armaments [Ethiopia] had paid for earlier." Though both governments were to blame for the abrupt end of the Ethiopian-American military ties, the same official laments: "It seemed foolhardy to burn our American bridges behind us without knowing the road ahead."⁶⁹

Having severed its relations with Washington, the Därg began to look for another reliable arms supplier. The Därg appeared to have believed that only the Soviet Union could replace the United States as a major supplier of weapons. Although the first military aid agreement was signed between Ethiopia and the U.S.S.R. as early as December 4, 1976, the Soviets were not yet ready to fulfill their pledge for several reasons. Firstly, though the Därg denounced American imperialism, Ethiopian-American relations were still warm until the coming of Jimmy Carter to the White House in early 1977. Secondly, in the eyes of the Soviets, there were pro-American officials within the Därg, and the Soviets were not certain about the future course of the Ethiopian revolution. Finally, the Soviets were heavily involved in training and equipping Somalia's armed forces, and so they were not enthusiastic about doing business with their partner's enemy, Ethiopia.⁷⁰

But the events that took place in early 1977 seem to have forced the Soviets to reconsider their policy toward Ethiopia. The Soviets welcomed the emergence of Māngestu as head of the military government following the February 3 palace shoot-out, the abrogation of the Ethiopian-American defense agreement, and the closure of the Qañāw station and the MAAG office. As a result, the second military aid agreement was signed between Māngestu and

the Soviets in May 1977. By that agreement, the Kremlin promised to deliver weapons to Ethiopia.⁷¹

Until the arrival of significant amounts of Soviet weapons, the Därg needed other arms suppliers to help repulse the imminent Somali invasion. Ethiopian delegations visited Peking (now Beijing); Pyongyang, North Korea; and Tel Aviv, Israel. The Chinese did supply Ethiopia with a sizable quantity of small arms. However, they were not willing to deliver heavy weapons. Similarly, the North Koreans shipped one consignment of small arms. But they made the second consignment conditional: It could be delivered only if the Ethiopian government closed down the South Korean embassy in Addis Ababa. The Därg flatly rejected the precondition, and North Korea shipped no more armaments for several years. The Israelis, on their part, provided Ethiopia with small arms and vital spare parts.⁷²

The Soviets end support for Somalia

The small arms Ethiopia procured from various sources fell far short of what the government required to withstand the Somali aggression. When the full-scale invasion finally came in July 1977, the underequipped Ethiopian army was outgunned by the Somalis and lost to the invaders extensive territory in the Ogadén and several towns, including Jijiga.⁷³ To add insult to injury, the Soviets continued to supply arms to Somalia even after its aggression against Ethiopia. On September 18, 1977, Mängestu, therefore, warned the Kremlin that if Moscow continued to supply weapons to Somalia, Ethiopia might consider “the idea of fresh American arms supplies.” The warning worked. In late September, the Soviets supplied Ethiopia with a number of T-55 tanks, ballistic missile rocket launchers, and MiG-21 combat aircraft for the first time.⁷⁴

Even then, the Soviets could not simply walk out of Somalia. For some time, they were arming both Somalia and Ethiopia. But they came to realize that they could not ride two horses at once. They had to make a choice. After considering the Därg’s dependability with regard to its commitment to socialism, Ethiopia’s demographic and economic capability, its historical similarity to Russia, and its distinction as a founding member and seat of the OAU, the Soviets decided to embrace Ethiopia. Consequently, they slowed down fuel and weapons shipments to Somalia. By the end of September 1977, the Soviets were supplying Somalia only with small arms and spare parts. Then, on October 18, 1977, the Soviet ambassador to Ethiopia, Anatoly Ratanov, made it clear that his government “had completely stopped supplying arms to Somalia and was now providing Ethiopia with defensive weapons to protect her revolution.”⁷⁵

On November 13, 1977, the Mogadishu government retaliated by expelling all Soviet and Cuban military advisers from Somalia.⁷⁶ But Siad Barre’s action only infuriated the Soviets and pushed them to step up their shipments

of arms to Ethiopia. For the next six weeks, starting from November 26, 1977, about fifty Soviet freighters were reported to have unloaded 60,000 tons of weapons at the port of Assäb. In addition, several Antonov-22 and Ilyushin-76 transport planes made 225 flights to Addis Ababa between November 1977 and February 1978, airlifting Soviet military hardware worth hundreds of millions of dollars. The Soviet consignment included eighty fighter aircraft, six hundred T-54 and T-55 main battle tanks, and three hundred armored personnel carriers (APCs). The massive delivery of Soviet arms was so unprecedented that the total value of the weapons shipped within a few months reached \$1 billion, surpassing, Robert G. Patman says, "the total value of United States aid provided to Ethiopia between 1953 and 1977."⁷⁷

The Ethiopian army was thus outfitted with Soviet weapons by the end of 1977. The army soon began a large counteroffensive. In March 1978, the army scored a decisive victory over the Somali invaders.⁷⁸ But victory was achieved through a huge sacrifice. During the Somali onslaught and the Ethiopian counteroffensive, the army lost, among other weapons, seventy-five American-made tanks and eighty-five APCs, and fifty-eight Soviet-made tanks and twenty-two APCs.⁷⁹

Following the end of the Somali-Ethiopian war of 1977–1978, the Ethiopian government signed a treaty of cooperation and friendship with the Soviet Union that was supposed to last twenty years. For the next ten years or so, Ethiopia heavily depended on Soviet weaponry. The Soviet shipment of weapons reached record levels on the eve of major military campaigns. In early 1982, for instance, the Ethiopian government received a huge amount of Soviet arms for Operation Red Star. Two years later, the Soviets supplied Ethiopia with military equipment worth several million dollars for the Bahrä Nägash Operation.⁸⁰ On his part, Māngestu admitted: "Accompanied by senior officers, I left for the Soviet Union to ask for weapons. Of course, they declined to give me all that I requested . . . Nevertheless, they gave me three-fourths of what I required. Although I needed many helicopters, they gave me only two squadrons of helicopters."⁸¹ The Soviet weaponry delivered since 1977 included all sorts of arms ranging from the common RGD-5 and F-1 hand grenades to T-62 main battle tanks and the 122mm BM-21 forty-round rocket launchers.

Other Communist states also supplied Ethiopia with various types of military hardware, though not on the same scale as the Soviets. The arms suppliers included such Eastern Bloc countries as Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic (GDR), Hungary, North Korea, Poland, and Yugoslavia. All sorts of military equipment were delivered in accordance with the agreements signed between the Ethiopian government and the Communist states. Weapons were acquired in four different ways: free of charge, cash purchase, commercial credit, and state credit purchase. Between 1974 and

1991, the Ethiopian government received U.S. \$9,420,328,651 worth of military equipment from all Communist states. Out of this, U.S. \$727,105,228 worth of weapons were donated free of charge. While arms purchased in cash amounted to U.S. \$359,654,525, the commercial credit and state credit purchases stood at U.S. \$939,375,882 and \$7,395,193,016, respectively.⁸²

The state credit purchases were of two kinds: 50 percent or 100 percent payable within ten years, usually with 3 percent annual interest. According to state credit purchase agreements, the Ethiopian government was required to make payments in easily convertible foreign currency to the accounts of the Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of the U.S.S.R. The agreement also obliged Ethiopia not to transfer the acquired military equipment to a third party. This provision was not, however, always respected. Contrary to the agreement, the Ethiopian government supplied weapons to two Somali armed groups, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and the Somali National Movement (SNM), as well as to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).⁸³

Weeks or months after the signing of such agreements, the Soviet embassy in Addis Ababa would notify the MOND of the name of the vessel carrying military equipment, its date of arrival at the port of Assäb, and the amount and type of cargo carried. The MOND was responsible for protecting such ships and unloading their cargo as soon as possible so that they could return safely and quickly.⁸⁴

In addition to Soviet weapons, the government periodically sent lists of desired light and heavy weapons, military vehicles, ammunition, and explosives and aerial bombs to the Eastern Bloc countries so as to buy arms through a bidding process. Once prices were submitted to the MOND, the interest rate, the time of payment, and other factors were carefully considered. For instance, the lowest unit prices of a 7.62mm AKM assault rifle submitted by Poland, the GDR, and China were \$115, \$118, and \$150, respectively. Similarly, the minimum price for a T-55 main battle tank submitted by Czechoslovakia was \$70,000, by Poland \$107,530, and by the GDR \$180,000. In both cases, the GDR was selected because the interest rate for a commercial credit purchase was the lowest (2.5 percent), the payment could be completed within twelve years, and no advance payment was required. The lowest unit prices for a BM-21 rocket were \$890 from Yugoslavia, \$900 from Bulgaria, and \$925 from Romania. Bulgaria was selected because it offered a ten-year payment period, charged a 2.5 percent interest rate, and required no advance payment.⁸⁵

Arms received free of charge, purchased in cash, and bought on credit reached gigantic proportions by the mid-1980s. Among the heavy weapons given to Ethiopia free of charge were 28 T-62 tanks from South Yemen, 100 T-55 tanks from Libya, 122 T-55 tanks from the GDR, and 1 MI-8 combat helicopter from Cuba.⁸⁶

Table 2.4. Small arms and heavy weapons acquired between 1974 and 1991

Type of equipment	Quantity
Pistols	42,449
Personal equipment	1,701,300
Light machine guns (LMGs)	30,773
Heavy machine guns (HMGs)	13,402
Mortars	3,619
Grenades and rocket launchers	14,720
Man-pulled artillery	548
Vehicle-towed artillery	1,188
Antiaircraft guns	2,321
Main battle tanks	1,767
Armored personnel carriers (APCs)	1,665

Source: MOND, Finance 103, Military Equipment Delivered since 1974, 1991, 7–9.

Table 2.5. Types of ammunition delivered to Ethiopia (1974–1991)

Type of equipment	Quantity
Ammunition for small arms	1,542,932,310
Antiaircraft ammunition	42,480,430
Launcher ammunition	2,002,800
Mortar shells	3,170,484
Rockets	410,420
Artillery shells	2,631,333
Hand grenades	3,395,590
Mines	2,068,200

Source: MOND, Finance 103, Military Equipment Delivered since 1974, 1991, 10.

With regard to small arms, Soviet-made equipment became the standard infantry weapons in Ethiopia. These weapons included the AK-47, AK-74, and AKM assault rifles; the RPD and RPK-74 light machine guns; the PKM and PKS general-purpose machine guns; and the 12.7mm DShK-38 (known by Ethiopians as “Deshqa”) and the 14.5mm ZPU-1 (corrupted locally as

“Zägäw”) heavy machine guns. Though not as numerous, there were other varieties of small arms in the hands of the Ethiopian army, such as the Chinese, Yugoslav, and Russian SKS carbines, PPSH-41 and PPS-43 submachine guns (both Soviet-made), Type 52/57 Czechoslovak machine guns, M-49 and M-56 Yugoslav submachine guns, and Type 67–2 general purpose Chinese machine guns.⁸⁷

The army also possessed various Soviet combat vehicles, including T-34, T-55, and T-62 main battle tanks and four types of Soviet-made armored vehicles: the BTR-60P, BTR-60PB, BMP-1, and BTR-152V. BTR stands for *bronetransporter* (armored transporter), and BMP for *boevaya mashina pehoty* (infantry combat vehicle). In the late 1980s, the army received several Ch’onna-Ho combat vehicles, the North Korean version of T-62 main battle tanks.⁸⁸ The antitank and antiaircraft weapons and artillery acquired by the army included RPG-7 (rocket-propelled grenade) launchers; 76mm ZiS-3 towed antitank guns; 82mm B-10 recoilless guns; 60mm, 82mm, and 120mm mortars; ZU-23 and ZSU-23–24 Shilka antiaircraft guns; 85mm D-44 antitank field guns; 100mm towed antiaircraft guns; 122mm D-30 field howitzers; 9P-151 Metis, 9P-135 M-1 Fagot, GRAD-P 9P-111 Malyutka, and 9P-58 Strela missile systems; and 122mm BM-21 and 240mm BM-24 rocket launchers.⁸⁹

Each army unit was supposed to be armed with a specific number of light and heavy weapons. Tables 2.6 and 2.7 show the optimal arms possessed by infantry and mechanized units.

Table 2.6. Arms possessed by infantry units

Type of weapons	Infantry company	Infantry battalion	Infantry brigade
AK or AKM assault rifles	79	167	1,233
LMGs	9	27	111
RPG-7 launchers	9	27	111
PKM general purpose machine guns	2	6	21
Pistols	15	62	284
82mm B-10 antitank guns	2	3	12
82mm mortar	-	4	16
9P-111 antitank rocket launchers	-	3	12

Source: MOND, Operations 135, *Ya Egraña Brigade Aquam* [An Infantry Brigade’s Structure], 59–60.

Table 2.7. Arms possessed by a mechanized brigade

Type of weapons	Quantity
AK or AKM assault rifles	2,006
Signal pistols	300
RPC-7 launchers	84
RPK LMGs	87
RP-46 HMGs	21
82mm B-10 recoilless antitank guns	18
82mm mortar	12
27mm 2M guns	18
37mm antiaircraft guns	12
ZU-23 towed twin antiaircraft guns	4
9P- 111 Malyutka rocket launchers	9
122mm D-30 field howitzers	12
T-55 main battle tanks	22
BTR-60 APCs	66
BRDM-2	5
BRDM-110	4
Binoculars	123

Source: MOND, Administration 971, *Ya Mechanized Brigade Ya Mäsarya Aquam* [Organization of a Mechanized Brigade's Equipment], 6.

Losses in Eritrea

The acquisition and distribution of weapons to various army units went on more or less smoothly until 1984. Beginning in early 1984, however, the army began to lose a considerable amount of weaponry in Eritrea. In March 1984, the EPLF destroyed the Weqaw Command at Algéna. The arms destroyed and captured by the EPLF at Algéna were estimated at 43,565,659 birr (about U.S. \$21 million).⁹⁰

A considerable number of light and heavy weapons had also fallen into EPLF hands when the insurgents temporarily occupied Täsänäy in January 1984 and Bäréntu in July 1985.⁹¹ But none of these setbacks could parallel the Afabét disaster of March 1988. At Afabét, the army lost, among other weapons, many T-55 tanks, BM-21 rocket launchers, 122mm D-30 field howitzers and other heavy artillery, mortars, and machine guns. Besides, the EPLF cap-

tured intact ammunition depots worth millions of dollars.⁹² In the words of Māngestu, the EPLF captured “a mountain of ammunition.”⁹³

The fall of Afabēt was a turning point not only in the war in Eritrea but also in Ethiopian-Soviet relations. During Māngestu’s visit to Moscow in July 1988, the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, told him that arms deliveries would be substantially reduced. And he urged Māngestu to peacefully resolve the war in Eritrea.⁹⁴

But the Ethiopian government had little thought of beginning peace negotiations with the insurgents. What mattered most was the procurement of weapons and the reequipping of the army. By the beginning of 1989, the loss of armaments had reached alarming proportions. Between September 1974 and January 1989, the army had lost 188,669 small arms, 2,744 antitank guns, 599 antiaircraft guns, 760 mortars, 292 artillery pieces, 380 APCs, 443 tanks, and 3,929 military vehicles on all the fronts.⁹⁵

In February 1989, the army suffered another major setback in Sheré and lost many more weapons. In the wake of the Sheré disaster, the Soviets decided not only to scale down arms deliveries to Ethiopia but also to reduce the number of their military advisers.⁹⁶ Those cutbacks forced the Ethiopian government to start peace talks with the insurgents and to look elsewhere for the much-needed arms. As the army continued to lose subsequent battles, the government held peace talks with the EPLF in September 1989 in Atlanta, Georgia. Jimmy Carter, the former American president, played the role of mediator. Even though they turned out to be fruitless, follow-up negotiations with the EPLF were held in November 1989 in Nairobi, Kenya, and in October 1990 and February 1991 in Washington, D.C.⁹⁷ Likewise, peace talks with the TPLF in Rome in November and December 1989 and March 1990 bore no fruit, mainly because, as Bahru underlines, the insurgents “were negotiating from a position of strength while the government was doing so from a position of weakness.”⁹⁸

Help from Israel and North Korea

While negotiations were taking place, the government continued to import weapons from various sources, chiefly from Israel and North Korea. Ethiopian-Israeli relations, which had been severed in 1978, were renewed in the mid-1980s. By way of soothing tensions between the two countries, Māngestu was reported to have given the Israelis a green light to airlift about 10,000 Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews) in 1984 from Sudan. The first airlifting of the Beta Israel was named Operation Moses. In return, the Israelis are said to have sold to Ethiopia arms worth \$20 million in 1985. Full diplomatic relations between the two countries were restored when Israel opened its

embassy in Addis Ababa in December 1989. Israel continued to give military assistance to Ethiopia until 1991.⁹⁹

The North Korean military assistance was much more extensive than that of the Israelis. In 1989 and 1990, the North Koreans trained fifteen special commando (Sparta) brigades with a total of 31,295 men and equipped them with personal gear, small arms, and ammunition free of charge. In 1989, North Korea also supplied Ethiopia with 72,000 mortar shells on the basis of an interest-free state credit purchase.¹⁰⁰

More importantly, the North Koreans helped Ethiopia establish several armament plants. One of these was the Gafat Engineering Plant (named the Elala Gäda Project) set up at Mojo near Addis Ababa. Starting from late 1989, the plant was meant to produce 20,000 assault rifles of the Kalashnikov series and 1,400 LMGs annually. A total of 122,507,163 birr (about U.S. \$59 million) was allocated for the completion of the project.¹⁰¹ The other North Korean-supported undertaking was the Hormat Project, an ammunition plant to be built at Hormat, near Gudär (about 130 kilometers west of Addis Ababa). The plant was planned to produce 50,000 shells for 60mm mortars, 160,000 shells for 82mm mortars, 30,000 shells for 100mm artillery, 50,000 shells for 122mm field howitzers, and 20,000 shells for 130mm artillery annually. The government allocated 259,200,000 birr (about U.S. \$125 million) obtained from North Korea to build the ammunition plant, which was expected to begin production in 1990.¹⁰² Both plants did produce armaments in the last days of the military government. Following the downfall of the Därg in May 1991, however, they were abandoned for many years and were only recently revived by the current government.

North Korea was also a member of a consortium of Communist states, including the U.S.S.R., Romania, Yugoslavia, and China, that agreed to help Ethiopia set up a major industry for the production of small arms and heavy weapons, along with their spare parts. The industry was expected to produce 7.62mm automatic assault rifles, 7.62mm LMGs and HMGs, antitank and anti-aircraft guns, mortars, 73mm to 130mm artillery pieces, T-55 main battle tanks, BTR-60 APCs, and BRDM-2 and BMP-1 armored vehicles. Although the study of the project was scheduled to be finalized in October 1989, the Soviet Union withdrew from the consortium without giving any explanation.¹⁰³ The Soviet withdrawal might have been part of their policy of disengagement from supporting Ethiopia militarily.

The withdrawal of the Soviet Union did not deter North Korea from supporting Ethiopia in other projects. In 1989, the Ethiopian government signed an agreement with North Korea to set up a plant for the production of various explosives ranging from hand grenades to antitank rockets. The plant was supposed to begin production in 1994.¹⁰⁴ The project was dropped after the collapse of the military government and only recently has been readopted.

As the government was doing its best to build armament plants with North Korean support, the insurgents continued to win major battles. In February 1990, the army suffered two major military disasters: the fall of Meşewa (also spelled Massawa) into EPLF hands and the overrunning of all government defenses between Mount Guna and Baher Dar by the EPRDF forces. In terms of the loss of weaponry, the Battle of Meşewa was unparalleled. In the nearly thirty-year war, the Ethiopian government had never lost such a huge amount of weaponry in a single battle as it did at Meşewa. Table 2.8 indicates this huge loss.

Table 2.8. Weapons captured or destroyed by the EPLF at Meşewa (February 1990)

Type of weapons	Captured or destroyed	Ammunition captured or destroyed
Main battle tanks	103	-
Armored personnel carriers (APCs)	62	-
Military vehicles	391	-
Transport vehicles	62	-
Heavy artillery	131	16,463 shells
Medium artillery	26	21,081 shells
MB-21 rocket launchers	14	2,440 rockets
Mortars	76	22,702
Antitank guns	157	19,788
Antiaircraft guns	131	215,488
HMGs	336	4,094,689
LMGs	337	-
Automatic assault rifles	9,819	11,442,618
Pistols	732	22,612
Binoculars	135	-
Hand grenades	16,682	-

Source: MOND, Administration 1439, *Ya Huasā Derejet Woqtawi Hunēta* [Current Situation of the SRA's Logistics], 15/6/82 E.C., 6–8.

Despite the unprecedented loss of arms at Meşewa, the army still had large amounts of weaponry at its disposal. In 1990, the army possessed the heavy weapons shown in Table 2.9.

Table 2.9. Heavy weapons possessed by the army (1990)

Army unit	Manpower	Heavy weapons possessed						
		Tanks	APCs	Artillery	Mortars	Antiaircraft	Antitank	Machine guns
First Revolutionary Army (FRA)	28,056	176	168	206	80	355	492	468
Second Revolutionary Army (SRA)	144,628	277	112	330	376	370	2,137	4,734
Third Revolutionary Army (TRA)	43,018	62	7	65	107	28	410	523
Fourth Revolutionary Army (FORA)	19,331	14	14	42	28	66	43	347
603rd Corps	31,378	80	50	58	5	75	269	252
Assäb Command	15,595	69	16	28	7	26	61	90
Total	282,006	678	367	729	603	920	3,412	6,414

Source: MOND Operations 493, *Bahumu Gisé Yallä Tawagi Hayl Enna Mäsanya*
[Currently Existing Combatants and Weapons], 1982 E.C., 1.

As the insurgents came closer to achieving total victory, the army destroyed a considerable amount of its own weaponry during chaotic retreats.¹⁰⁵ In June 1990, the Third Division, for instance, demolished thirteen T-55 tanks, ten heavy artillery, thirty mortars, six antitank rocket launchers, and ten Gaz-66 and twenty Ural military vehicles just before the fall of Märañña (also spelled as Meragna) into EPRDF hands.¹⁰⁶ During my visit to Märañña in March 2006, I found the town still littered with remnants of destroyed tanks, artillery pieces, and military vehicles. In the end, the Ethiopian army, one of the most heavily armed ground forces in Africa, collapsed in May 1991 as the EPLF and EPRDF forces captured Asmära and Addis Ababa, respectively.

CHAPTER THREE

Logistical and Command Problems (1977–1991)

Between 1977 and 1991, the army underwent dramatic organizational changes. In terms of manpower, it had enormously expanded from four divisions in 1974 to thirty-nine divisions (thirty infantry, five mechanized, three airborne, and one commando) with 497,237 men by April 1990.¹ To keep such a large army constantly ready for war posed huge logistical challenges. Although attempts were made to keep the army properly supplied, the highly centralized command structure did not leave room for independent action on the part of commanders at various levels. That hindrance contributed to the collapse of the army.²

Growth and reorganization

The Därg inherited the American system of military organization from the imperial government. This system (from squad to army levels) as well as the army ranks (from corporal to general) remained unchanged even after the advent of the Soviets.³

The Därg maintained the four divisions organized during the imperial times. The idea of creating a new force was conceived in 1975 when the Därg began to face internal and external challenges. Accordingly, in November 1975, as indicated earlier, the military government organized a new force named Nābälbal (Flame). Unlike other army formations, the Nābälbal troops were organized into battalion-sized units named *hayl* (force). Each *hayl* was composed of four hundred men.⁴

Within a matter of sixteen months, the government organized twenty Nābälbal forces, all of them controlled by the Därg. However, the creation of the Nābälbal force outside the ground forces made other units hostile to it. The Nābälbal troops were treated as alien groups instead of as comrades in arms. The problem was so serious that the government was forced to merge

the Nābālbāl force with the ground forces in late 1977. Subsequently, all the Nābālbāl units were reorganized into the Sixth Nābālbāl Division.⁵

Since the Nābālbāl troops were organized as rapid deployment forces, the Dārg used them during emergency situations. In 1977, before being deployed to Eritrea and Harārgé, the Nābālbāl troops disarmed the people of Addis Ababa in the house-to-house search known as *asāsa*. The operation was intended to curb the urban terrorism of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), which opposed the Dārg. In the process, the Nābālbāl soldiers seized thousands of small arms and documents from EPRP members and sympathizers.⁶

Immediately after that operation, the Nābālbāl troops were sent to Eritrea and Harārgé. Those sent to Diré Dawa, along with the militia, saved the town from falling into Somali hands in July and August 1977.⁷

It was in response to the same emergency situation—the Somali invasion of Ethiopia in 1977—that the government organized six other militia divisions (that is, the Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth) that year. The Seventh Division was sent to Eritrea, and the Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Divisions were deployed to Harārgé. The Twelfth Division was also moved to the southern front.⁸

Even after the defeat of Somalia, the government continued to boost the numerical strength of the army. It created four new militia brigades in 1978 and 1979: the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth. All four divisions were based in northern Ethiopia.⁹

Having stationed the Eighth, Ninth, and Eleventh Divisions in the Ogadén and the Fourth and Twelfth Divisions on the southern front to repulse any Somali incursion, the government organized the other army units into seven task forces (501st to 507th). These seven task forces were assigned to wipe out all insurgents in Gondär, Tigray, and Eritrea. Accordingly, a total of 86,722 troops were gathered. Between June 8, 1978, and February 7, 1979, the task forces launched a highly coordinated offensive in Gondär, Tigray, and Eritrea. With the exception of Naqfa, all the towns in Eritrea were brought under government control.¹⁰ However, repeated attempts to take Naqfa failed. As discussed earlier, Soviet military experts advised the government that Naqfa could only be captured by specially trained mountain rangers. The government then organized four mountain infantry divisions (the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Second) in 1980 and 1981. In the meantime, the Twentieth Infantry Division was organized and stationed at Dägähabur.¹¹

As part of the preparation for Operation Red Star, the Dārg created two more infantry divisions (the Twenty-Third and Twenty-Fourth), raising the number of infantry divisions to twenty-three. Then, just a month before the launching of Operation Red Star, the government reorganized the army units in northern Ethiopia into commands. As a result, five commands came into existence, namely Mäbräq (Lightning), Ma'ekälawi (Central), Mäket (De-

fend), Nadāw (Demolish), and Weqaw (Thrash). While the Ma'ekālawi and Māket Commands included two divisions each, the Mābrāq, Nadāw, and Weqaw Commands were made up of three infantry divisions each.¹²

The five commands were placed under the newly created Military Operations and Planning Command (MOPC). Brought thus under the MOPC were fourteen divisions (four of them mountain infantry), and fifteen artillery, six tank, and seven anti-aircraft battalions. Of the total sixty-three brigades, fifty-five were infantry, six were mechanized, and two were paracommando brigades.¹³ Of a total of 131,848 men under the five commands, only 66,749 troops took part in actual combat during Operation Red Star.¹⁴

Days after the launching of Operation Red Star, the Mābrāq Command was dissolved owing to a military setback on the Kārkābāt front. Most of its troops were later brought under the Nadāw Command.¹⁵

Following the end of Operation Red Star in May 1982, the country's ground forces were reorganized into two revolutionary armies and two commands. The First Revolutionary Army (FRA) was based in Harār and included five infantry divisions (the Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twentieth), a tank brigade, an artillery brigade, a mechanized brigade, and a commando brigade. Headquartered in Asmāra, the Second Revolutionary Army (SRA) was made up of thirteen infantry divisions placed under the Weqaw, Nadāw, Mānter (Clear Up), Māket, and Sāmén Me'erab (North-Western) Commands. The North-Western Command was based in Māqālē. There were two independent commands, the Southern Command, based in Awasa, and the Central Command, headquartered in Addis Ababa.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the government was still organizing new army units. Thus, between 1985 and 1987, three new divisions were created: the 102nd Airborne Division and the First and Second Mechanized Divisions. The First Mechanized Division was stationed in the Ogaḍén, and the Second Mechanized and the 102nd Airborne Divisions were deployed in Eritrea.¹⁷

Along with the formation of new units, reorganization of the army continued. Accordingly, in February 1985, the North-Western Command, which had been placed under the SRA, was divided into two independent commands: the Tigray Command based in Māqālē and the North-Western Command headquartered in Gondār. The Tigray Command was assigned to carry out counterinsurgency operations against the TPLF, while the North-Western Command had security responsibilities in Gondār and Gojjam.¹⁸ In the same year, the government created the Western Command to curb the activities of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in western Ethiopia.¹⁹ Two years later, the North-Eastern Command was organized and based in Wollo. It included the First and the Fifth Infantry Divisions.²⁰

Six months after the separation of the North-Western Command from the SRA, the latter waged two major military campaigns known as the Red Sea and the Bahrā Nāgash operations. During Operation Red Sea, launched in

August 1985, the army successfully regained Bäréntu and Täsänäy. But Operation Bahrä Nāgash failed to attain its objective—the capture of Naqfa. The only achievement was the recapture of Algéna in October 1985. Following the end of Operation Bahrä Nāgash, the SRA was reorganized into five commands, namely Bārged (Open Forcefully), Nadāw, Mānter, Barka, and Māket. However, due to logistical problems and fear of an EPLF onslaught, the Bārged Command was withdrawn from Algéna, a desolate spot, and it replaced the Barka Command based at Aqordat in early August 1986. The SRA now had four commands with twelve divisions (ten infantry, one airborne, and one mechanized) and three other separate mechanized brigades. A year later, the Bārged Command was dissolved as a result of serious manpower depletion, and the SRA was left with three commands: Mānter, Māket, and Nadāw.²¹

Recruiting falls short

Within a span of five years, three commands were dissolved in Eritrea, mainly because of heavy casualties. In response to the escalation of the war, the government continued to form new divisions. Accordingly, in the fall of 1987, it organized the 103rd Commando Division. By November 1987, the manpower of the ground forces had reached 250,752 men.²²

As can be observed from Table 3.1, with the exception of noncombatants who staffed the various departments of the ground forces and military schools, all eight commands had a substantial shortage of troops. Among the eight commands, the FRA and the SRA had roughly 35 and 27 percent shortfalls, respectively. That understaffing was primarily because of the casualties the commands sustained from constant engagements with the insurgents.²³

Worse still, the SRA suffered a major blow in March 1988—the destruction of the Nadāw Command. Shocked by this unprecedented loss, the government reorganized the army into thirteen corps (601st to 614th). In the meantime, two new armies came into existence through the amalgamation of existing commands. These were Third Revolutionary Army (TRA) and the Fourth Revolutionary Army (FORA). The North-Western, Tigray, and North-Eastern Commands were respectively renamed the 603rd, 604th, and 605th Corps and formed the TRA. Likewise, the Southern, Central, and Western Commands were designated, respectively, as the 611th, 612th, and 614th Corps and formed the FORA.²⁴ Among the remaining army corps, the 601st and the 602nd were placed under the FRA, and the rest—that is, the 606th, 607th, 608th, 609th, and 610th—were based in Eritrea under the SRA. In addition, the government organized the Third and the Fourth Mechanized Divisions, and they were identified as “Project-80” Task Forces. By July 1988, therefore, the total manpower of the ground forces had reached 388,926 (see Table 3.2).²⁵

Table 3.1. Manpower of the ground forces (November 1987)

Armies or commands	Allocated manpower	Existing manpower	Difference
Ground forces various departments and military schools	8,243	19,711	+11,468
FRA	68,063	44,174	–23,889
SRA	131,380	95,682	–35,698
Southern Command	22,157	12,756	–9,401
Central Command	6,578	4,243	–2,335
Tigray Command	31,745	26,586	–5,159
North-Western Command and 103rd Commando Division	34,043	25,637	–8,406
Western Command	6,578	5,723	–855
North-Eastern Command	4,361	16,240	+11,879
Total	313,148	250,752	–62,396

Source: MOND, Administration 747, *Ya Sementu Ezoch Yäsāw Hayl*
[Manpower of the Eight Commands], Hedar, 1980 E.C.

Table 3.2. Manpower of the Ground Forces (July 1988)

Armies or commands	Allocated manpower	Existing manpower	Difference
Ground forces various departments and military schools	8,243	49,841	+ 41,598
FRA	51,861	36,635	–15,226
SRA	152,077	163,192	+11,115
TRA	109,388	104,938	–4,450
FORA	25,519	23,040	–2,479
Project–80 Task Forces	23,732	11,280	–12,452
Total	370,820	388,926	+18,106

Source: MOND, Administration 747, *Ya Aratu Ezoch Yäsāw Hayl*
[Manpower of the Four Commands], Hämlé, 1980 E.C., 1–2.

While the number of noncombatants doing a wide range of activities in various departments of the Ground Forces continued to swell, the FRA and the two mechanized divisions still faced a serious shortfall. The latter, in particular, had a shortage of about 53 percent. But following the destruction of

the Nadāw Command, the government recalled the national military reservists into active service, enabling the SRA to overcome its alarming manpower depletion.²⁶

In February 1989, the army suffered another setback in Sheré, and the 604th Corps disintegrated. In the wake of the Sheré disaster, the government continued to expand the army. Thus, between 1989 and 1991, seven infantry divisions (the Twenty-Fifth to the Thirty-First), two airborne divisions (the 204th and 205th), a mechanized division (the Fifth), and eighteen Sparta brigades came into existence. The last two infantry divisions (the Thirtieth and Thirty-First) were made up of former POWs who had been captured and later released by the EPLF and the EPRDF.²⁷

Despite the continuous expansion and restructuring of the army, the basic military organization from squad to division remained unchanged. At the bottom of the army's hierarchy was the *guad* (squad), which had nine to twelve men. Three or four squads formed a platoon known by Ethiopians as *yamāto* (literally, *hundred*). A platoon usually consisted of twenty-eight to thirty-two soldiers, led by a second lieutenant. The units in the hierarchy next above the platoon were the *shambāl* (company) and *shalāqa* (battalion). The Ethiopian names *shambāl* and *shalāqa* literally mean *captain* and *major*, respectively, referring to the commander instead of the army unit. A company was made up of three to four platoons or about ninety to one hundred twenty troops. A battalion, in turn, consisted of three to four companies with three hundred to four hundred soldiers each. Three to four battalions formed a brigade, which normally consisted of 2,000 to 3,000 troops. In the Ethiopian army organization, the brigade could carry out operations independently. Above the brigade was the division, which consisted of 8,000 to 12,000 men or three to four brigades. Though difficult to maintain, the ideal manpower was 9,836 men for an infantry division, 11,463 soldiers for a mechanized division, and 11,802 paratroopers for an airborne division.²⁸

The all-important supporting units

Higher in the army hierarchy, the number of infantrymen declined with a proportional increase of supporting units, such as tank, artillery, antiaircraft, engineering, reconnaissance, communications, and medical teams. Frequent reorganization of the army was effected above the division level. Between 1977 and 1991, divisions were put under commands, task forces, corps, and armies at different times.²⁹

In principle, all army units were to be led by the commander of the ground forces. In practice, however, the National Revolutionary Operations Command (NROC), chaired by Māngestu, controlled all activities of the ground forces. Side by side with the commander of the ground forces were the Political Department, the Military Security Organization, and the inspector gener-

Table 3.3. Number of officers, NCOs, and privates in various army units

Army unit	Number of officers	NCOs and privates	Total
Infantry division	972	8,864	9,836
Infantry brigade	190	1,909	2,099
Battalion	33	393	426
Mechanized division	1,153	10,310	11,463
Mechanized brigade	246	2,300	2,546
Mechanized battalion	34	438	472
Airborne division	1,007	10,795	11,802
Airborne brigade	199	1,487	1,686
Airborne battalion	32	432	464
Tank brigade	227	1,544	1,771
Tank battalion	27	114	141
Artillery brigade	128	1,157	1,285
122mm artillery battalion	19	203	222
130mm artillery battalion	22	230	252

Source: MOND, Administration 972, *Ya Tāvagi Kefloch Aquam* [Organization of Combat Units], 1–2.

al. The Political Department was in charge of indoctrinating combatants with Marxism-Leninism. Military Security was charged with carefully watching over any form of dissent in the army. The inspector general was supposed to evaluate the combat effectiveness of the army, investigate causes of military defeats, and charge those responsible for disasters.³⁰

Contributing to the army's success or failure were four main departments under the commander of the ground forces. These were Operations, Training, and Intelligence; Administration, Organization, and Mobilization; Budget and Finance; and Logistics.³¹ The Operations, Training, and Intelligence Main Department prepared plans of operation, gathered intelligence about insurgents and external enemies, and looked after the training of combatants. The Administration, Organization, and Mobilization Main Department handled administrative issues, kept records of the army's manpower, and supervised mobilization. The Budget and Finance Main Department dealt with financial matters, and the Logistics Department was responsible for the timely provision of supplies to all army units throughout the country.³²

Under the four main departments, there were six supporting departments, namely, medical service, engineering, communications, artillery, antiaircraft, and tank and armor.³³ One of the serious problems the army faced was a critical shortage of medical personnel. According to the 1980 organization

guideline, physicians were to be assigned to army units above the brigade. In practice, however, most army units had only nurses and health assistants. Assigning physicians was not possible even at the division level. Doctors were only available at the armed forces hospitals in Addis Ababa, Asmara, and Harär. Originally, the army trained its own nurses. But that effort was abandoned after 1982 owing to administrative problems. The ground forces then began to employ civilian nurses and other medical personnel. Even then, the shortage of medical personnel remained chronic. By 1979–1980, there were only 360 nurses and physicians in the army.³⁴

The other supporting unit consisted of the combat engineers. The combat engineers usually went ahead of the infantry to clear minefields, construct roads and bridges, dig water wells, and build military camps. They were also required to lay antipersonnel and antitank mines at strategic passes and around military camps to prevent the enemy from mounting a surprise attack. During times of emergency, combat engineers were, however, expected to fight as infantrymen.³⁵

While the combat engineers went ahead of the infantry to make its advance easier, the artillery supported it from behind by bombarding enemy defenses and lines of advance from a distance. The artillery units in the Ethiopian army were organized into batteries (equivalent to an infantry's company), battalions, and brigades. Tank units were structured into battalions and brigades. During engagements, they were expected to advance along with the infantry. Also attached to the infantry were antiaircraft units organized into batteries and battalions.³⁶

This intricate organization could only operate smoothly if there was constant communication. The communication unit was staffed with personnel trained not only in sending and receiving coded radio messages but also in intercepting and deciphering enemy communications.³⁷

Organized in a more or less similar pattern were other formations, mainly the mechanized, airborne, commando, and special commando units. What made the mechanized formations different from other infantry units was the relatively high concentration of tanks and APCs. By 1991, there were five mechanized divisions.³⁸

Unlike the mechanized divisions, the airborne, commando, and special commando units were light infantry formations (armed with light weapons). In theory, they were meant for special missions, such as demolishing targets behind enemy lines, relieving besieged infantrymen, or mounting swift assaults. In practice, however, they were used like other infantry units until 1991. While the airborne and commando units were raised to division level, the special commandos (Sparta) were organized into brigades. By 1991, there were three airborne divisions, one commando unit, and eighteen Sparta brigades.³⁹

Keeping the army supplied

Logistics can be defined as “the business of moving, supplying and maintaining military forces.” Thomas M. Kane calls it “one of the most crucial elements” that determines the outcomes of military operations. Kane explains, “Soldiers who run out of food, fuel or ammunition will cease to fight.”⁴⁰ The role of logistics is so crucial that it “make[s] up as much as nine-tenths of the business of war.” As one soldier puts it, “The more I see of war, the more I realize how it all depends on administration and transportation.”⁴¹ The soldier’s observation is, in fact, in agreement with Field Marshal Erwin Rommel’s contention on the indispensability of logistics and logisticians. Rommel declares:

In fact the battle is fought and decided by the quartermasters before the shooting begins. The bravest men can do nothing without guns, the guns nothing without plenty of ammunition; and neither guns nor ammunition are of much use in mobile warfare unless there are vehicles with sufficient petrol to haul them around.⁴²

Despite their central contribution to the success of war, logisticians are usually overshadowed by military commanders. As one writer puts it, “Logisticians are a sad, embittered race of men very much in demand in war, who sink resentfully into obscurity in peace.”⁴³ There has, thus, been a tendency to ignore the role of logisticians because, another writer explains, “Logistics is a troublesome work. It is all labour and no glory.”⁴⁴

Logistics and logisticians had a similar fate in Ethiopia. In both oral and written narratives of military campaigns, there has always been a strong tendency to overemphasize the operational aspect and ignoring the logistical dimension. Reports and informants alike, for instance, tend to ignore the role of the huge logistical preparation that played a crucial role in the defeat of Somalia in March 1978 and the army’s stunning victory in Eritrea between June 1978 and February 1979. Those are just two examples. It was the Logistics Department that kept the army fed, equipped, and moved around during those years of constant fighting.⁴⁵

The Logistics Main Department (LMD) was placed under the vice minister of defense for logistics and finance, a position held by Major General Ab-bäbä W. Maryam between 1977 and 1991.⁴⁶ Among other things, the LMD was in charge of:

Purchasing and distributing food to the army and keeping a reserve;
Ensuring the existence of an adequate supply of fuel and lubricants
for the army;

Making sufficient number of vehicles available for transporting food and fuel and depots for storage;
 Acquiring various types of arms, ammunition, and explosives through purchase and aid; distributing them to the army in collaboration with the Operations Department and keeping a record of weapons lost or destroyed;
 Importing communication and electronic equipment and distributing them to the army;
 Acquiring engineering equipment and distributing them to army units; supervising construction and maintenance activities;
 Coordinating surface, air, and sea transport and using all available means of transport during emergency situations;
 Preparing agreements for the purchase of equipment from other countries and following up the acquisitions; and
 Acquiring spare parts for equipment imported from different countries.⁴⁷

Placed under the LMD were six departments, namely engineering, logistics, foreign aid, purchasing, military stores, and transport.⁴⁸ This elaborate organizational structure was not limited to the higher echelons of the MOND. All units from the army level down to the platoon level duplicated this structure. As a matter of rule, soldiers were provided with rations for three days along with a basic load of ammunition under operational conditions. According to the LMD, a basic load meant 120 bullets. Reserves of all the necessary supplies were kept in the rear of each army unit. Uniforms and other quartermaster equipment, such as water canteens, belts, and field caps, were issued once every six months.⁴⁹

The food provided to the army was of two kinds: ready-made or canned, and freshly cooked. During engagements, rations were usually distributed to troops. At times of relative peace, freshly cooked food was served.⁵⁰

The LMD purchased canned food from various suppliers. Beef stew was bought from meat factories in Addis Ababa, Asmāra, and Gondär; *shero wot* (cereal stew) and vegetable soup were purchased from manufacturers in Addis Ababa, Diré Dawa, and Asmāra. The Ethiopian Livestock Resources Development provided the LMD with marmalade and tomato sauce.⁵¹

Along with canned food, soldiers were also given galettes (hard biscuits) produced by flour factories. The amount of such ready-made food supplied to soldiers was not, however, satisfactory. Higher army formations were, therefore, given bread-baking machines to enable them to distribute fresh bread to troops. The baking machine given to the TRA in 1988 could, for instance, produce two thousand loaves of bread per hour. In addition, private bakeries in Asmāra, Mäqälé, Gondär, and Dässé supplied fresh bread to the army on a contractual basis. The price paid to private bakeries for a quintal of bread

(100 kilograms or about 220 pounds) varied from 100 birr (about U.S. \$48) in the late 1970s and early 1980s to 60 birr (about U.S. \$29) in the late 1980s.⁵²

The amount of bread given to each soldier was 710 grams. That was later reduced to 510 grams. On the other hand, the amount of sugar given to each soldier was raised from 50 to 150 grams.⁵³

There were times when soldiers were denied their daily rations and forced to go without food for forty-eight to seventy-two hours. That was the fate of the infantrymen of the Fifteenth Battalion and of the ninety-eight airborne troops (parachuted in to reinforce them) besieged at Naqfa between September 1976 and March 1977. The EPLF guerrillas that laid siege on the Naqfa garrison had cut off supply routes and positioned anti-aircraft guns around the town to prevent air support. As a result, the government could neither send supplies overland nor drop them from airplanes at lower altitudes. The only workable solution was to put food, medical supplies, radio batteries, and ammunition in bundles and parachute them from higher altitudes. There were times when the parachuted supplies were diverted by wind to areas controlled by the guerrillas. For instance, out of eleven bundles dropped on December 14, 1976, the guerrillas took nine. Similarly, on January 2, 1977, the guerrillas seized six of the seven bundles dropped to the besieged troops.⁵⁴

Expectedly, fierce fighting took place when supply parachutes fell on no man's land. The guerrillas repeatedly attempted to storm the garrison, and the besieged troops lost many fighters every day. There were no medical supplies to treat the wounded. On several occasions, the besieged soldiers ran out of food and went hungry for days. Their suffering was so unbearable that they asked the government to bomb them along with the guerrillas. Finally, on March 22, 1977, fifty-three infantrymen and twenty-two airborne troops broke through the siege and joined the army at Afabét, ending the logistical nightmare.⁵⁵

The government faced similar logistical problems during the Somali invasion in 1977. Following the outbreak of the war, the Logistics Department tried hard to keep the troops supplied in the remote garrison towns of the Ogadén. It was during this time of trouble that two DC-119 planes made a risky flight at night to Awaré to supply the army with much-needed fuel and ammunition at the end of July 1977. The planes evacuated children and women on their return flight.⁵⁶

As the Somalis overran most of the garrison towns in the Ogadén, the government had to evacuate troops and supplies to Harär and Diré Dawa. In the meantime, the Logistics Department rushed militia units to the various fronts with all available means of transport. It was during this time of national emergency that women of Addis Ababa and other major towns did a remarkable job in preparing food for the militia.⁵⁷

By the end of 1977 and early 1978, the Logistics Department had another challenging task: unloading the enormous number of weapons shipped from

the Soviet Union and moving them to the various fronts. In the final analysis, the victory over Somalia would not have been possible without effective logistical support to the army.⁵⁸

Soon after the defeat of Somalia, another huge logistical operation was carried out to launch a large-scale counteroffensive against the northern insurgents. On May 29, 1978, the NROC set up its advance headquarters at Mäqälé. The Second Revolutionary Liberation Army (SRLA), later renamed the SRA, was divided into seven task forces with a total of 86,722 combatants. Although the northern theater stretched from the Gondär-Humära-Täsänäy road to the Mäqälé-Asmära road and from Meşewa to Qarora, the Logistics Department successfully transported troops and supplies to various fronts. This logistical support enabled the army to sweep through Gondär, Tigray, and Eritrea as far as the Sahel Mountains within a relatively short time.⁵⁹

Similarly, good logistical support was provided to the army during Operation Lash, carried out between August 26 and December 5, 1980, a plan with the dual goal of defeating the rebels in the southeastern provinces and expelling Somalia from the Ogadén. Since the army was busy in Eritrea in 1978 and 1979, the government had to postpone Operation Lash for two years to avoid a two-front operation. That delay enabled the Somali army to control the Férfér, Gäladin, Mustahil, and Shelabo areas between 1978 and 1980.⁶⁰

Operation Lash thus aimed at dealing a final blow to the Somali army and Somali insurgency in the Ogadén. What made Operation Lash particularly challenging was the vastness of the operational area, which stretched from the Ethiopia-Djibouti-Somalia border to the southern and eastern tips of the Ogadén.⁶¹

As troops marched through the arid lowlands of the Ogadén, water became so scarce that several soldiers died of thirst. The Logistics Department averted a much more disastrous situation by supplying water by helicopters in October 1980.⁶² The army concluded the operation with marked success in December 1980 without facing a serious logistical difficulty.⁶³

As much as good and timely supplies of provisions contributed to military success, logistical breakdown hampered operations. Such a problem occurred in February 1981, when the Eighteenth MID swept across the main TPLF base areas. Between February 13 and 23, 1981, units of the Eighteenth MID captured TPLF's training camp, medical center, and arms depot in Dädäbit, Addi Da'ero, and Sur, respectively. As the troops advanced to Aşärga, they faced a critical shortage of rations, ammunition, and radio batteries. As a result, they had to suspend their operations and send an urgent message to the army in Gondär asking for a swift delivery of supplies. But Colonel (later Brigadier General) Tariku Ayné, in charge of the North-Western Command, was not in his office, and his whereabouts could not be traced for several hours. Hours later, a helicopter took off from Gondär, landed at Aksum for refuel-

ing, and finally dropped five quintals of ammunition and some radio batteries from a height of forty meters. Soon afterward, another helicopter, which had been undergoing maintenance, delivered rations, ammunition, and radio batteries, and evacuated wounded soldiers. The considerable delay helped the insurgents to regroup and to put up a strong resistance. By the time the mountain infantrymen resumed their offensive, they could not advance at the same pace as before.⁶⁴

A year later, the government launched Operation Red Star. The operation posed probably the greatest challenge to the Logistics Department. To closely supervise and coordinate logistical activities, the vice minister of defense for logistics and finance and the heads of logistics departments at various levels opened offices in Asmara. They held morning and evening meetings to evaluate daily logistical activities and to make urgent decisions.⁶⁵

Logistical problems began to crop up soon after the launching of the operation. On the Kärkäbät front, the major problem was the scarcity of water. To avoid dehydration, each soldier was to carry two canteens of water. The operation on that front was thus named “Yä Hulät Kodda Zämächa” (“A Campaign of Two Canteens”). Deployed on the same front, the Twenty-First MID tried to advance. But it soon met well-informed EPLF fighters entrenched at a strategic pass. The insurgents managed not only to hold their positions but also to mount an outflanking counteroffensive. Instead of positioning a larger force around its watering point, the MID had stationed only a platoon. The insurgents found it easy to eject the small force there and capture the water well. The division soon faced a critical shortage of water. A number of troops died from thirst. The shortage of water was thus one of the main factors behind the collapse of the Kärkäbät front, which in turn contributed to the failure of the entire Operation Red Star.⁶⁶

On the Algéna front, the logistical situation was relatively better. There, the Fifteenth and the Twenty-Third Divisions of the Weqaw Command received various supplies carried by several helicopters and one hundred camels.⁶⁷ As the troops captured mountains, camels could no longer be used. The other alternative was to use donkeys. The areas controlled were, however, so barren that there was no forage for the donkeys. The helicopters were busy evacuating the wounded. The army had, therefore, to use human labor to transport water uphill.⁶⁸

Water was not the only problem. The shoes distributed to the Weqaw troops were of low quality and unfit in size for many soldiers. The command had thus to send back two thousand shoes for replacement.⁶⁹

On the Naqfa front, too, logistical problems had a serious impact on the operation. As the Third Division was advancing to Naqfa on February 22–23, 1982 (Yäkatit 15–16, 1974, on the Ethiopian calendar, E.C.), it ran out of rations, water, and ammunition. The much-needed supplies were flown in by helicopter, but foggy weather prevented the helicopter from landing or

dropping its cargo. Probably aware of the logistical crisis, the insurgents counterattacked the Third Division and pushed it back to Tiksi.⁷⁰

The Nadāw Command had also faced shortages of artillery shells and helicopter fuel. It can thus be argued that logistical problems contributed in one way or another to the failure of the operation.⁷¹

Following the inconclusive Operation Red Star, logistical problems continued to worsen and to greatly hamper the army's operational readiness in Eritrea. In late 1983, the army in Eritrea faced a near-crisis situation in logistics. In a letter written on November 24, 1983, to the vice minister for logistics and finance, Brigadier General (later Major General) Rāggasa Jimma, the commander of the army in Eritrea, expressed his frustration at the logistical crisis in the following terms:

At the moment, many of the military vehicles under the [Northern] Command are out of order due to land mines and long service. As a result, it is no longer possible to: (a) transport troops and supplies; (b) move artillery pieces and anti-aircraft guns; (c) distribute water and fuel to each front; (d) evacuate the wounded and the sick . . . Subsequently, a very serious problem has been encountered in carrying out operations . . . Out of the total number of vehicles that had been operational, 696 vehicles, 43 APCs, and 39 tanks have gone out of service. What impact would all this have on logistical support and operational readiness is not difficult to perceive. (See Appendix III.)⁷²

The letter made it clear that while 19 tanks, 17 APCs, and 354 other vehicles were permanently disabled beyond any chance of repair, the army also had 26 APCs, 20 tanks, and 342 other vehicles that might be fixed if the necessary spare parts could be obtained. Unless the higher officials took urgent measures, the letter warned, the army might be forced to give up the areas regained with so much sacrifice and yield them to the insurgents.⁷³

Not only did such problems occur in the northern theater, they also struck the Logistics Department at the center of the country. Between July and November 1984, the total amount of undelivered food stored in Addis Ababa reached 97,521 quintals. Of these, 64,116 quintals should have been shipped to the Northern Command and 13,737 quintals to the Eastern Command. Similarly, the Logistics Department failed to transport 7,220 quintals of rations to various fronts during the same period. This failure was attributed to a shortage of trucks. On top of that, the department failed to buy in time 7,509 quintals of *téff*, an important food grain in Ethiopia; 12,091 quintals of wheat flour; 3,980 quintals of barley flour; 7,086 quintals of macaroni; 3,908 quintals of lentils; 5,254 liters of edible oil; and 950 quintals of tomato sauce for the army's consumption. These logistical problems emanated from a shortage of vehicles; lack of storage space; incompetence in storing, loading, and un-

loading; absence of timely supervision and follow-up; and failure to train the staff in logistics management.⁷⁴

The most acute problem the various army units as well as the Logistics Department reported was a critical shortage of trucks. In 1984 and 1985, the SRA, for instance, put the problem at the top of the list of difficulties it encountered.⁷⁵

One of the army formations greatly affected by the logistical problem was the Nadāw Command. When the shortage of vehicles remained a chronic problem, the Nadāw Command was allocated 3,900 birr (about U.S. \$1,880) in February 1985 to buy thirty donkeys for moving supplies to areas inaccessible by truck. In June of that year, the Logistics Department earmarked 13,000 birr (about U.S. \$6,280) to the SRA for the purchase of four hundred pack animals to transport supplies.⁷⁶ One can imagine the huge disparity between the transportation capacity of four hundred donkeys and the SRA's daily need for supplies, which reached four hundred tons by the end of the 1980s.⁷⁷

The LMD tried to solve the problem of transportation by using private trucks. The owners of private trucks were often instructed through the National Road Transport Corporation (NRTC) to put their trucks at the disposal of the LMD for a specific time. By 1986, out of the total of 527 trucks assigned to transport supplies to the SRA, 430 (about 82 percent) belonged to private owners.⁷⁸

The heavy reliance on private trucks was not without problems. In the first place, the private owners seldom received timely payments for the transport services they rendered. It usually took more than five months to process a payment request because the request had to pass from an army unit to the Ministry of Finance through the Logistics and Finance Departments and the MOND. In addition, the deployment of trucks to various fronts was risky. On several occasions, trucks were blown up by land mines. As a result, private owners were reluctant to make their trucks available to the army. They could not, however, turn down orders, because their permits to operate trucks might be suspended by the NRTC.⁷⁹

Even then, truck owners could create serious problems. Once they reached Asmāra, drivers would usually hide their trucks somewhere or leave them in garages for up to six months under the pretext of maintenance. The drivers were even reported to have held part-time jobs elsewhere. It was this problem that prompted Major General Rāggasa Jimma to write a letter labeled "Very Urgent" and "Top Secret" to the chief of staff, Major General Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam. Written on May 15, 1986, the letter strongly reminded the chief of staff to implement an earlier recommendation—the replacement of private trucks by government vehicles. General Rāggasa expressed his frustration in his concluding remarks (see Appendix IV):

We have come to believe that the seriousness of the situation has not been given due attention. Owing to the failure to take urgent

measures, we have reached a dangerous situation where we could not move troops on reserve or transport supplies . . . A decision that would be taken once things are out of hand is worthless.⁸⁰

The logistical crisis affecting the SRA continued unabated. As a result of transportation difficulties, the SRA was left with only enough combat rations to last twenty-four hours in November 1986. The other problems reported included shortages of uniforms, personal tents, ration bags, water canteens, jerricans (flat-sided cans used for gasoline, water, and other liquids), and cooking utensils.⁸¹

While the SRA continued to suffer from almost all sorts of logistical problems, the only difficulty the FRA reported was a chronic shortage of mechanics to maintain its tanks and artillery pieces.⁸² On its part, the North-Western Command requested spare parts and mechanics to maintain the tanks and APCs of the Fourth Mechanized Division.⁸³

In all the army units, there was a constant demand for spare parts for armaments, ranging from small arms to heavy weapons. When requests for parts were submitted to the Soviet Union, the response was sometimes discouraging. The Soviets commonly rejected requests, notified the Ethiopians that parts were “out of production,” or even made no response at all.⁸⁴

Table 3.4. Ethiopian ground forces spare parts requirements submitted to the General Engineering Department (GED), U.S.S.R.

Year of request	Number of items requested	Accepted number of items	Out of production	Not accepted	Unable to clarify	No response
1985	2,307	1,783	205	195	124	-
1986	2,075	1,511	157	327	61	19
1987	2,041	265	330	352	97	997
Total	6,423	3,559	692	874	282	1,016

Source: MOND Finance 182, Ground Forces Annual Spare Parts Requirement, 1987, 1.

Of the total number of items requested of the U.S.S.R.’s General Engineering Department and the General Technical Department between 1985 and 1987, only 55 and 25 percent, respectively, were considered for delivery.⁸⁵ Thus, because of the shortage of spare parts, a number of tanks, APCs, artillery, and other weapons remained unrepaired for months. That lack of maintenance tremendously reduced the combat readiness and effectiveness of the army. The combat competence of the mechanized units in the Ogadén was, for instance, reported to be “dangerously low” in 1985.⁸⁶

Table 3.5. Ground forces spare parts requirements submitted to the General Technical Department, U.S.S.R.

Year of request	Number of items requested	Accepted number of items	Out of production	Not accepted	Unable to clarify	No response
1985	1,228	470	25	119	202	412
1986	1,884	400	16	54	48	1,365
1987	322	-	9	11	1	302
Total	3,434	870	50	184	251	2,079

Source: MOND Finance 182, Ground Forces Annual Spare Parts Requirement, 1987, 1.

The SRA's combat effectiveness was also much reduced by the unavailability of spare parts. Although logistical problems were still rife, the SRA launched two major operations in 1985 in quick succession. The first one, Operation Red Sea, was carried out to regain Bäréntu, which had fallen into EPLF hands on July 6, 1985, following twenty-four hours of ferocious fighting. Before the launching of Operation Red Sea in late July and early August, the Logistics Department transported 4,834 troops from the SRA, 741 soldiers from the Southern Command, 1,295 cadets from the Hurso and Holäta military schools, and 21,369 national servicemen to Asmara by air, sea, and land transport. Obviously, the timely movement of troops contributed a great deal to the success of the operation.⁸⁷

The army regained Bäréntu on August 25, 1985. In an attempt to maintain the strategic initiative, the government decided to launch Operation Bahrä Nägash in October 1985. Since Operation Bahrä Nägash was an afterthought, the EPLF was given a breathing space of forty-six days until the government worked out details of the offensive. That pause enabled the insurgents to recover from earlier losses and get ready for the impending government assault. Considerable delays in transporting troops from Meşewa to Mälka Fatuma and a shortage of transport helicopters to move paratroopers to the Algéna front contributed to the undoing of Operation Bahrä Nägash.⁸⁸

In the years that followed, logistical problems continued to hamper the army. The principal problem was the ever-increasing number of combat and transport vehicles that became defective mainly due to shortages of spare parts and mechanics. The lack of vehicles was the burning issue explained to Mängestu during his visit to various army units in early 1988. Mängestu, however, believed that the whole logistical problem should not be reduced to a shortage of spare parts and mechanics. For him, the problem emanated, rather, from the absence of an efficient logistical management system and the failure of the logistics personnel to carry out their duties. He emphasized that,

instead of dealing with the problem, people in the Logistics Department were trying to blame all problems on the shortage of spare parts. For him, that was tantamount to treason.⁸⁹

Actually, Mängestu was right in pointing out the absence of an efficient system of management, particularly in the Logistics Department. Three ad hoc committees had been formed some months earlier to investigate the problems of the ground forces' manpower administration, finance, and transport systems, and they found the same thing.⁹⁰ Probably Mängestu was quoting those findings. He then instructed the commander of the ground forces to set up a committee that could identify all military vehicles and weapons that had been temporarily disabled due to the shortage of spare parts and those that could not be repaired.⁹¹

In the wake of the Afabét disaster, the SRA, for instance, reported that out of the 3,361 military vehicles at its disposal, 1,136 were out of order. Among these vehicles, 503 were destroyed, 222 were permanently disabled, and the remaining 411 could be repaired if spare parts were available. The SRA thus asked the Logistics Department to deliver new military vehicles and weapons to replace losses. However, its request was not always satisfactorily answered. In 1988, for example, in response to its request for five hundred Ural-375 trucks, it received only eighty-eight vehicles. The SRA again asked for the delivery of one hundred fifty Gaz-66 trucks in the same year. But it received only seven vehicles. The numbers of heavy weapons and small arms delivered to the SRA were also far less than the requested quantity.⁹²

The other army formation struck by a logistical crisis was the Tigray Command. In an urgent and top secret letter to the defense minister, Brigadier General Addis Agellachāw, commander of the Tigray Command, stressed the absence of artillery units and the critical shortage of anti-aircraft guns, heavy machine guns, antitank guns, hand grenades, ammunition, fuel, and rations.⁹³

The TRA, which was created in April 1988, inherited some of these logistical problems, the most critical one being a shortage of water canteens. That problem was, however, solved later when local plastic products replaced imported canteens. Soon after its creation, the TRA allocated thirty-one vehicles for the 603rd Corps, twenty-four for the 604th Corps, and eighteen for the 605th Corps. On its part, the Ministry of Transport and Communications assigned a total of seventy N-3 trucks on a permanent basis to the TRA.⁹⁴

In spite of the efforts made to tackle the problem, the SRA's logistical difficulties were far from over. Between July 1987 and June 1988, the Logistics Department arranged 794 flights and 72 sea voyages to transport 47,760 tons of food, 1,000 tons of uniforms and other quartermaster equipment, 21,898,469 liters of fuel, and great quantities of light and heavy weapons to the SRA. Even then, the SRA reported a shortage of military trucks, light and heavy machine guns, and RPG-7 launchers.⁹⁵ Similarly, between March 19 and September 26, 1988, the Logistics Department coordinated 380 Boeing

Jet and 234 Antonov-12 flights to Asmāra and 62 sea voyages by commercial ships from Assāb to Meṣewa to transport 80,786 troops, 206 vehicles, 124 tanks and APCs, 48 artillery pieces, and 1,260,342 quintals of supplies. By September 1988, the SRA was made up of 156,578 soldiers. To feed those troops, the SRA required 93,947 quintals of food per month. In addition, the SRA consumed 63,600 quintals of ammunition, 2.7 million liters of fuel, and 18,900 quintals of other supplies on a monthly basis. With regard to medical care for the wounded and the sick, only 8,000 hospital beds were available in Asmāra, Meṣewa, and Kārān.⁹⁶

Although the Logistics Department attempted to keep the SRA supplied, there were still serious shortages of rations (especially biscuits and canned food), sugar, tea, ammunition, uniforms, and other quartermaster materials. With respect to medical care, the SRA also reported a shortage of internists, dentists, and opticians as well as stretchers, beds, and pajamas. The food provided for the wounded was so insufficient that it hampered their recovery.⁹⁷

Disaster follows disaster

While requests for the provision of all sorts of supplies flooded the Logistics Department, the TRA launched a huge campaign in June 1988 known as Operation Adwa. Initially, units of the TRA performed well. It was during the third phase of the operation that serious logistical problems began to crop up. At this stage, troops of the 603rd Corps were ordered to converge on Dansha from Gondār, Dābarq, Humāra, and Mātāmma. The soldiers from Mātāmma scrambled for more than ten days through thick forest before reaching the Angārāb River, another obstacle. The soldiers had to wait there until an engineering team arrived to help them cross the river. Once they reached Dansha, the troops were ordered to march to Kaza and Dājāna without the support of tanks and artillery. Since the operation was carried out during the rainy season, many soldiers drowned during the retreat while trying to cross rivers. Some managed to reach Gondār, but most of the troops retreated to Humāra.⁹⁸

A more disastrous situation occurred in February 1989, when the army at Humāra was ordered to evacuate the town and return to Gondār by way of Mātāmma, since the insurgents had cut off the Humāra-Gondār road. The army destroyed a considerable quantity of its own property before evacuating Humāra. But there were no vehicles in sufficient numbers to evacuate the troops. Thousands of soldiers had to walk long distances along inhospitable lowlands without enough water. Many died from thirst. It was during this tragic evacuation that a civil servant who could not endure the suffering of his family killed his wife and children before taking his own life.⁹⁹

In the same month, the 604th Corps was destroyed at Sheré. The three-man committee formed to investigate the reasons for the destruction of the

corps underlined that, among other things, there had been logistical problems, such as a shortage of rations, ammunition, explosives, hand grenades, radio batteries, fuel, and medical supplies.¹⁰⁰ Once the TPLF severed the Asmāra-Sheré and the Gondār-Sheré supply routes, the high command should have known that it was a strategic mistake to station a large army in Sheré because it would be impossible to supply the troops.

In 1990, the army suffered two more disasters: a defeat on the Guna front and the loss of Meṣewa (also spelled Massawa). On the Guna front, while fighting was still going on, the 603rd Corps destroyed its own arms depot. According to Brigadier General Haylé Mälläsä, the party secretary for South Gondār, that explosion could have destroyed the town but did not. The explosion was so powerful (and very similar to the arms depot destruction of Bäqlo Bét in Addis Ababa that occurred in June 1991) that it brought down a helicopter.¹⁰¹ During the Battle of Meṣewa, too, the fall of the ammunition depots into EPLF hands subjected the army at the port to a merciless artillery bombardment. In terms of logistics, the capture of Meṣewa by the EPLF was probably the greatest blow the army suffered throughout the entire war with the Eritrean separatists.¹⁰²

Thereafter, the Ethiopian army in Eritrea received supplies only by airplane. It was a great challenge for the LMD to supply the SRA (whose daily requirement of food, ammunition, and fuel had reached four hundred tons) solely by air. In the first week of June 1990, the SRA was, for instance, left with provisions that could last for only ten days.¹⁰³ The situation was so critical that Ethiopian Airlines was forced to cancel its international flights and assign its passenger and cargo planes to transport supplies to Asmāra.¹⁰⁴ On June 3, 1990, the SRA's Logistics Department reported that it had no food in stock and requested more flights to deliver the much-needed rations for the army (see Appendix V).¹⁰⁵

To make matters worse, the intensification of the war and its expansion to Wollo, Gondār, northern Shāwa, and Asosa brought about serious logistical challenges. At the end of March 1990, for example, the Freight Transport Corporation was instructed to assign trucks that could transport a total of 70,653 quintals of supplies to Diré Dawa, Kombolcha, Gondār, Asosa, Gambēlla, and Däbrä Berhan.¹⁰⁶ The shortage of trucks became more critical than ever before. As a result, food and other supplies for the 603rd Corps had to be delivered by air to Baher Dar.¹⁰⁷

The deployment of hundreds of trucks to various war fronts also strained the national economy. The situation was so serious that all army units were ordered to return trucks to the Ministry of Transport and Communications as soon as they had transported the required supplies to their respective destinations.¹⁰⁸

In 1990, the Logistics Department paid a total of 1,958,387.24 birr (about U.S. \$94,600) to all truck owners for the transport services they rendered.¹⁰⁹

In addition, the Logistics Department earmarked money for renting pack animals so as to transport supplies to troops stationed in areas of northern Shāwa that were inaccessible to trucks.¹¹⁰

It was in this part of Shāwa that the last government offensive was launched in May 1990 with the intention of encircling and annihilating the insurgents. To that end, the Third Division advanced from Gugufu to Karra Mesheg. The division was supposed to surround and destroy the rebels but instead fell into their trap and had its supply lines severed. It then faced a chronic shortage of rations and ammunition. Its commander, Colonel Sārāqā Berhan, repeatedly asked his superiors to deliver the urgently needed supplies by helicopters. To his dismay and disappointment, the helicopter that landed at Mārañña brought uniforms and shoes instead. Finally, on June 15, 1990, the insurgents decimated the Third Division after five days of ferocious fighting, and the remaining hungry troops retreated to Dābrā Berhan.¹¹¹

For the eleven months that followed, the Logistics Department tried to keep the demoralized troops supplied. In practical terms, however, that was only an attempt to delay the advance of the insurgents to Asmāra and Addis Ababa.¹¹²

Māngestu in command

Between 1977 and 1991, by virtue of his authority as commander in chief of the armed forces, Māngestu was in full control of the army. All major decisions with respect to the deployment of army units, the launching of offensives and counteroffensives, promotions, demotions, or disciplinary actions had to be approved by Māngestu. Army commanders at various levels felt powerless to make their own decisions. Sadly enough, as Patrick Gilkes underlines, “Commanders even had to request permission from the commander in chief to move a brigade or any larger force.”¹¹³ Even during critical moments, Māngestu was not willing to give his commanders any freedom to act. In March 1988, for instance, while the EPLF forces were advancing to Afabēt in a pincer offensive after severing the army’s supply route, Brigadier General Wubātu Şāggayé (also spelled Wubetu Tsegaye), commander of the SRA, could not use the 102nd Airborne Division to reinforce the Nadāw troops. While the Nadāw Command was being annihilated by the EPLF, the Airborne Division sat idle in and around Asmāra.¹¹⁴

The defense minister and the commander of the ground forces, too, had to get Māngestu’s approval for operational decisions. While the Ministry of National Defense was left to deal with administrative affairs of the armed forces, command centers were set up at different times to lead major operations. The first such center was the National Revolutionary Operations Command (NROC), created on August 27, 1977, to coordinate operations against the Somali invaders and the northern insurgents. Headed by Māngestu, the

NROC was in charge of mobilizing the country's resources for the war effort, deploying army units to various fronts, and coordinating their operations.¹¹⁵

Just four days after the formation of the NROC, Māngestu showed up at Jijiga to boost the morale of the troops defending the town from Somali onslaught. Nevertheless, the Ethiopian resistance collapsed in a couple of days and Jijiga fell into Somali hands. On that crucial day, jet fighters were performing aerobatics over Revolution Square in Addis Ababa to mark the third anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution while they were badly needed to strike Somali positions around Jijiga.¹¹⁶ The high command was preoccupied with the celebration in the capital instead of trying to avert the fall of Jijiga into Somali hands. The NROC blamed dissidents for agitating troops to retreat, and several privates and officers were executed in September and November 1977.¹¹⁷

Then, in December 1977, the Supreme Military Strategic Committee (SMSC) was set up to map out a successful counteroffensive against the Somali forces. Composed of Ethiopian, Soviet, and Cuban high-ranking officers, the SMSC did work out an operation plan for regaining all occupied areas from Somali control that was successfully put into practice.¹¹⁸

Following the defeat of Somalia, the NROC established its advance headquarters at Mäqälé at the end of May 1978 to coordinate the counterinsurgency operations in northern Ethiopia. Māngestu thus closely supervised the army's counteroffensives and stayed in Gondär, Mäqälé, and Asmära for a while.¹¹⁹

The NROC continued to coordinate the army's operations until the end of 1979. By 1980, however, both the NROC and the SMSC were dissolved.¹²⁰ They were replaced by a new command center named the Military Operations and Planning Command (MOPC) in early 1982. The MOPC was headed by Māngestu and included senior officers of the armed forces. It was set up to coordinate the army's operations during Operation Red Star.¹²¹

Just before the launching of Operation Red Star, the high command committed a serious blunder that contributed to the failure of the whole campaign. Instead of deploying battle-hardened troops who could endure hardship on the arid and sandy lowlands of the Kärkäbät front, the military leaders threw new trainees of the Twenty-First MID, who had just completed their training but had no experience of actual fighting, into that inhospitable area. Worse still, division and brigade commanders ordered the troops to advance without sending out small bands to reconnoiter the areas ahead. As the soldiers surged forward, they fell into the insurgents' ambushes. When the rebels suddenly mounted frontal and outflanking assaults, the inexperienced mountain infantrymen were in complete disarray. The platoon that had been guarding the only water source was easily unseated by a larger EPLF force. As a result, many troops died of thirst. Although the Kärkäbät disaster was of its own making, the high command blamed Colonel Wubshät Mammo, commander of

the Twenty-First MID, and put him to death.¹²² The collapse of the Kärkäbät front, thus, contributed to the failure of the whole operation.¹²³

The triangular command

In the 1980s, Ethiopia's armed forces instituted a three-part command structure that became known as the triangular command. The first step toward the triangular command took place with the creation of the Military Security Organization in 1980 within the Ministry of Public and National Security, later renamed the Ministry of Internal Affairs. With the advice of the Soviet intelligence organization, the KGB, the Military Security Organization closely watched any form of dissension in the armed forces, investigated infiltration by the insurgents and agents of foreign intelligence, and carried out counterintelligence activities.¹²⁴ The Military Security Organization was entrusted until 1991 to Brigadier General Abbäbä G. Mäsqäl (also spelled Abebe G. Meskel), one of Mängestu's trusted course mates of the Holäta Academy.

The second organization that became part of the triangular command structure was the Main Political Administration (MPA) of the Revolutionary Armed Forces. Although political commissars had been attached to army units since the early years of the revolution, the MPA was founded in 1983 and placed under Captain Läggäsä Asfaw.¹²⁵ The MPA was taken over from Läggäsä and consecutively placed under Major General Gäbräyäs W. Hanna (a close companion of Mängestu), Major General Mäsfen Gäbrä Qal (a graduate of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, where British officers were trained, who had served as operations officer during the Somali-Ethiopian war), and finally Brigadier General Fälläqä Eshäté.¹²⁶

Copied from the Soviet Union, the triangular command was thus established to bring the armed forces under the complete control of the commander in chief. In theory, the three officers—the military commander, the political commissar, and the security officer—had separate responsibilities, and they were supposed to forge a harmonious working relationship. The army commander was in charge of military operations. The political commissar was concerned with the political indoctrination of combatants, and the security officer was expected to watch out for any form of dissidence within the army and to do counterintelligence work under the cover of ensuring the welfare of troops.¹²⁷

In practice, however, the triangular command structure bred mistrust, rivalry, mutual recrimination, and conflict. Usually, in comparison with the military commander, the security officer and the political commissar were much more junior in rank as well as in military experience. But by virtue of their political loyalty and party affiliation, they often interfered in the decisions of the military commander. The fact that both the political commissar and the security officer were not answerable to the military commander ex-

acerbated the unhealthy relationship within the triangular command. The political commissar and security officer could report about the performance and outlook of the military commander to their respective superiors: the political commissar to the MPA and the security officer to the Military Security Organization.¹²⁸

Army commanders made powerless

Especially after the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE), a Communist party headed by Māngestu, was founded in 1984 and the party structure was laid down in every army unit, political commissars gained the ears of the higher officials. That influence resulted in emboldening them to take more power into their hands, making the military commander feel more desperate and helpless. In theory, all operational matters were to be decided by the military commander. But now political commissars, who in some cases had little or no knowledge of map reading or military tactics, began to sit together with the military commander, discuss plans of operation, and countersign top military secrets.¹²⁹ Army commanders were thus stripped of their independence and authority. As a result, they were scared of taking initiatives even at times when there appeared a good chance of scoring a military victory. This feeling was especially evident among those commanders who were not members of the WPE.¹³⁰ Sadly enough, as Patrick Gilkes remarks, "for a general, success was as dangerous as failure." On his part, Māngestu seemed unprepared to see the emergence of an army "hero." Under such circumstances, it was difficult for the army to win a military victory because commanders were afraid to take advantage of opportunities. In an attempt to have complete control of the army, Māngestu thus deprived commanders of freedom of action.¹³¹

Māngestu's actions were, however, in conflict with conventional military wisdom. For Napoleon, for instance, the singleness of military command should be "the first necessity in war." He advises a government in power to "have entire confidence in its general; allow him great latitude."¹³² Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian military theorist, on his part stresses: "I do unquestionably state that when men become locked in battle, that there should be no artifice under the name of politics which should handicap your own men, decrease their chances for winning, and increase their losses."¹³³

Contrary to advice given by military strategists, Māngestu himself crippled the able army commanders while he conferred exalted positions on his confidants, who happened to be mainly his Holāta course mates and those who had served with him in the Third Division before 1974. Unfortunately, as Gebru stresses, "For all their political reliability, the cronies did not always make good generals."¹³⁴ Lamentably, the capable generals were not usually trusted by Māngestu. As a result, they were closely watched by the political

and security officers, intensifying the mistrust and conflict within the triangular command.¹³⁵

It was this sort of rivalry and conflict within the triangular command that eventually led to the Afabét disaster. The discord between the military commanders on one hand and the political and security officers on the other intensified following the appointment of Brigadier General Tariku Ayné as commander of the Nadāw Command in January 1987. The new commander is reported to have flouted orders coming from the commander and deputy commanders of the SRA. He was even accused by Māngestu of dismantling the triangular command within Nadāw and of demoralizing troops.¹³⁶

The government attempted in vain to normalize relations within the Nadāw Command by putting Tariku to death on February 15, 1988. But that execution worsened the crisis.¹³⁷ Four weeks later, the EPLF destroyed the Nadāw Command and captured Afabét. The Afabét military setback is a clear illustration of how political meddling can lead to disaster. The triangular command brought about division and insubordination among the Nadāw troops that made them vulnerable to the EPLF onslaught.¹³⁸

The Sheré military disaster that occurred a year later can also be partly attributed to political meddling. Some twenty days after the fall of Afabét, the government created the TRA with its headquarters at Mäqälé. Within a month, Captain Lāggāsā Asfaw was appointed as the overall administrator of Tigray.¹³⁹ Lāggāsā acted not only as the martial administrator of the region but also as the *de facto* commander of the TRA. His knowledge of military tactics and strategy was so poor that he ordered units of the 603rd Corps to converge on Dansha and then march to Kaza and Dājāna during the rainy season without the support of tanks and artillery. Eventually, the government offensive turned into a rout.¹⁴⁰

Worse still, neither Lāggāsā nor General Mulatu Nāgash, the TRA commander, anticipated that another military disaster was in the making in Sheré. They stationed units of the 604th Corps in Sheré without safeguarding the army's supply routes. According to the plans of Operation Aksum, the Tenth Division of the SRA was to open up the Asmāra-Enda Sellasè road and safeguard the supply route for the 604th Corps. But the mistrust and animosity between Lieutenant General Täsfayé G. Kidan, the martial administrator of Eritrea, on the one hand, and Lāggāsā and Mulatu, on the other, prevented the SRA and the TRA from launching a joint operation against the insurgents. General Täsfayé transferred the Tenth Division from Rama to Meṣewa without informing either Lāggāsā or Mulatu. The TPLF soon sealed off the army's supply route and in February 1989 destroyed the 604th Corps. Following the annihilation of the corps, Māngestu was quick to put the blame on the two martial administrators and General Mulatu:

The two leadership bodies do not seem to have realized that they were working for one country . . . and for one objective. [General] Täsfayé viewed the failure of the operation in Tigray and the damage inflicted [on the army] as an embarrassing setback for General Mulatu and Läggäsä Asfaw. While he was delighted to see Läggäsä [and Mulatu] being criticized and embarrassed, he does not seem to have realized that those dying and sustaining damage are the sons of Ethiopia.¹⁴¹

Mängestu himself is also to blame for appointing martial administrators and commanders in Tigray and Eritrea who were at odds with one another. In fact, Mängestu explicitly admits that he had appointed commanders “with the intention that one would spy on the other” so as to avoid conspiracy against him.¹⁴² But that did not prevent the senior commanders of the armed forces from attempting a coup in May 1989.

Sabotage and an attempted coup

Although the idea of toppling Mängestu had existed as early as 1984 or 1985, it was after the Afabét disaster that the senior officers believed that the situation was ripe to stage a coup.¹⁴³ According to Mängestu, Major General Märe'd Negussé, the chief of staff of the armed forces, was the leading conspirator who persuaded three other key officers to join him: Major General Abära Abbäbä, chief of operations; Major General Dämessé Bulto, commander of the SRA; and Major General Fanta Bälay, former commander of the air force and subsequently minister of industry.¹⁴⁴ In contrast, other sources indicate that General Fanta conceived and masterminded the attempted coup.¹⁴⁵

In any case, the conspirators were waiting until an ideal situation presented itself to stage the coup. In the meantime, they were taking measures that would worsen the military setback without arousing Mängestu's suspicion and precipitating his wrath. In hindsight, Mängestu accused the leaders of the abortive coup of sabotaging the army's operations so as to create a suitable situation for his overthrow.¹⁴⁶ There is now adequate evidence that supports Mängestu's claim. The sabotage included delaying and interrupting the training of commando units and deploying army units to areas vulnerable to interception or annihilation by insurgents. In 1987, for instance, the government decided to urgently recruit, train, and equip the 103rd Commando Division. The chief of staff was put in charge of the project. But the recruitment and training programs were delayed for several months.¹⁴⁷ Even once training was underway after much pressure, the recruits were made to suffer from logistical problems, the major ones being shortages of rations, uniforms, and shoes.¹⁴⁸

With the intention of getting firsthand information, Mängestu visited

the commandos stationed near Baher Dar in February 1988. While briefing Mängestu, Colonel Gétahun W. Giorgis, head of the Commando Division, explained the serious logistical problems. That briefing irritated the chief of staff, who later sent Colonel Gétahun to lead a poorly planned operation that nearly cost his life.¹⁴⁹ In the end, the commandos not only were deployed to Tigray and Eritrea before completing their training but also were dispersed, and some were forced to join the 102nd Airborne Division to redress losses.¹⁵⁰

In his memoir, Brigadier General Kasayé Chämäda also exposed how the senior army commanders were trying to bring about the demise of eminent units such as the Sānteq Mechanized Brigade and the 102nd Airborne Division by deploying them to death traps.¹⁵¹ Disappointed by the sabotage of the senior officers, Brigadier General Tāmāsgān Gāmāchu, commander of the 102nd Airborne Division, wrote to the inspector general on May 1, 1988, out of desperation, requesting to be relieved from his position.¹⁵² On the contrary, he was ordered to lead his army through the sandy plains of Ma'amido, where water was scarce. This poorly planned operation was aimed at recapturing Afabēt from the east. The operation was a complete disaster, and the Airborne Division lost its commander as well as many combatants.¹⁵³

The army based in Tigray was also subjected to systematic sabotage. When the TRA was created in April 1988, its intelligence department was not properly established. The TRA was thus left in complete intelligence blackout with respect to the movements of insurgents in Tigray. In January 1989, the defense minister ordered the chief of staff to visit the TRA and report to him about the army's situation. Twenty days before the Sheré disaster, the chief of staff related:

Since the enemy around Säläkläka has suddenly disappeared, the intended operation in May Berizo has been cancelled. While two rebel brigades are reported to have moved to Şä'ada Medri and another one to Da'ero Tāklay, the whereabouts of other brigades are unknown. For the time being, the rebel brigades whose whereabouts remained unknown are four. These brigades may launch attacks along the Adigrat, Humära, Gondär, Dässé-Mäqälé roads or on Mäqälé town.¹⁵⁴

Under such circumstances, the TRA could not foresee the military disaster that it was about to suffer at the hands of the insurgents. That setback finally came on February 19, 1989, when the TPLF destroyed the 604th Corps and captured Enda Sellasé.¹⁵⁵ While discreetly committing such sabotages, the conspirators of the attempted coup managed to establish contacts with leaders of the insurgents in an attempt to negotiate a cease-fire. That truce was brokered through the so-called Free Ethiopian Officers Movement (FEOM)

created in 1986 by officers captured by the EPLF at various battles and kept as POWs. The FEOM is reported to have had links with actively serving officers in the army.¹⁵⁶

Once a cease-fire was agreed upon to be effected at the time of the coup attempt, the conspirators were ready to try to topple Māngestu. Immediately after Māngestu's departure for a state visit to the German Democratic Republic on May 16, 1989, the leaders of the attempted coup held their meeting at the MOND. But they committed serious blunders that doomed the attempt from the start. In the first place, the coup leaders met in broad daylight in the heart of Addis Ababa when they should have neutralized the Presidential Guard stationed in the national palace and controlled key places such as the TV and radio stations, the airport, the telecommunication centers, and the army HQs in Addis Ababa and elsewhere. Secondly, instead of using forces stationed nearby, they chose to transport airborne troops from Asmāra to the capital. The operation was so disorganized that Brigadier General Qum-lachāw Dājāné, who arrived in Addis at the head of the airborne troops, lost contact with the coup leaders. Thirdly, the conspirators did not suspect that Colonel Tāsfayé W. Sellasé, the minister of internal affairs (who had given a tacit approval to the plot), would betray them at the eleventh hour. They did not even station a reliable force around the MOND building. As a result, the Presidential Guard soon surrounded them, and the coup attempt failed.¹⁵⁷

Despite the aborted coup in Addis Ababa, commanders of the SRA in Asmāra continued to broadcast through the Asmāra Radio that Māngestu had been overthrown. Troops of the SRA intercepted the radio conversation between the SRA commanders and the EPLF leaders. For combatants, that was treason punishable by death. More particularly, members of the 102nd Airborne Division, who had lost their commander and many of their friends through sabotage, found a perfect opportunity to punish the senior officers. Accordingly, Major General Dāmessé Bulto and more than a dozen other senior officers were brutally murdered by angry combatants and junior officers of the SRA.¹⁵⁸ Paradoxically, despite their rich experience and competence in military leadership, the senior officers failed to stage a successful coup. That prompted observers to comment: "If that is the best they could do it is not surprising the army has done so badly in Eritrea."¹⁵⁹

In addition to those killed, hundreds of officers suspected of being involved in the coup attempt were imprisoned. A year later, twelve army generals were sentenced to death. Those officials who remained loyal to Māngestu asked him to change the death penalty to imprisonment. But he rejected all mediation efforts. Eventually, the army was left without experienced commanders.¹⁶⁰ Even Māngestu himself admits, "In fact, after the death of General Dāmessé Bulto, there was no one in the north [to lead the army]."¹⁶¹

The army deteriorates

Following the failure of the coup attempt, Mängestu appointed loyalists who had been away from military responsibilities for several years as commanders. For instance, Addis Tädla, who had been on nonmilitary duties for more than a decade, was promoted to lieutenant general and made chief of staff of the armed forces.¹⁶² Similarly, Wubshät Dässé was made major general and appointed commander of the SRA. Embibäl Ayyälä was promoted to major general and became commander of the ground forces.¹⁶³

The deterioration in military leadership, together with war-weariness and erosion of morale and discipline, worsened the military situation in 1990 and 1991. Although the government continued to throw new recruits into the various fronts, many combatants preferred to retreat or to surrender en masse to the insurgents. In this regard, there was a widespread slogan among conscripts: “While to be conscripted is my obligation, to surrender is my right.”¹⁶⁴ Eventually, the army crumbled completely following the flight of the commander in chief to Zimbabwe on May 21, 1991.

CHAPTER FOUR

Military Intelligence (1977–1991)

Military intelligence is the acquisition of timely information, N. J. E. Austin and N. B. Rankov point out, about “an actual or potential enemy or area of operations.” Military intelligence is basically divided into strategic and combat intelligence. Strategic intelligence reveals the “capabilities and vulnerabilities” of an internal opponent or external enemy that may pose a threat to national security. Combat intelligence, on the other hand, is current information about an enemy, the enemy’s manpower and firepower, as well as the topography of an area used to plan and carry out an operation.¹

An army without intelligence may be surprised by its enemy at any time. A military operation conducted without timely and accurate intelligence is doomed from the start. In contrast, James F. Dunnigan says, “If you know what the enemy is up to while concealing your own plans, your chances of success increase immensely.”²

The Military Intelligence Department

Having realized the indispensability of intelligence, the imperial government had set up a military intelligence section in the 1950s. All army units from division down to battalion level had military intelligence sections. The importance attached to such information gathering was so high that officers were sent to Israel and the United States for training in military intelligence. Until 1974, these well-trained intelligence officers efficiently and satisfactorily gathered strategic and combat intelligence about Somalia and the Eritrean guerrillas.³

Serious problems began to surface in 1977 as the army experienced unprecedented expansion without a proportional increase in the number of intelligence officers. The army’s meteoric numerical increase, coupled with its engagements on several fronts, posed huge challenges to the handful of intelligence officers. The overstretched and understaffed Military Intelligence Department tried to cope with the demanding situation.⁴

For some time, the military government largely neglected the Military Intelligence Department. It was only in late 1981, as part of the preparation for Operation Red Star, that the government reorganized the department. Even then, the gathering of military information received secondary attention. Accordingly, instead of being organized as an independent department, the Military Intelligence branch was reduced to the status of an appendage or a subsection in the Military Operations Main Department.⁵

The new structure bred resentment among Military Intelligence personnel, who now came under army commanders and operations officers. One major source of conflict was that army commanders allocated only meager resources for information-gathering purposes.⁶ Smaller army units below the brigade were left without military intelligence sections, which was another structural problem. The justification given for depriving squads, platoons, companies, and battalions of vital intelligence support was the claim that they were incapable of conducting independent operations. Battalions were deployed to accomplish missions without intelligence support.⁷ According to the new structure implemented in late 1981, only brigades, divisions, corps, and armies were expected to have their own military intelligence unit.

At higher levels, the military intelligence organization became more intricate. At an army level, for instance, the Military Intelligence Department included six main sections, namely reconnaissance, agent deployment, POW and defector interrogation, education and research, topography, and intelligence evaluation and dissemination.⁸

Complex as the Military Intelligence Department might look, it had many flaws. The reconnaissance section, for example, consisted of silent patrol and combat reconnaissance subsections. The silent patrol units were required to move deep into enemy territory and kidnap enemy personnel for the sake of gathering intelligence. But due to linguistic and cultural barriers, soldiers could not stay behind enemy lines undetected. In an attempt to overcome such problems in Eritrea, a silent patrol force was created in 1984 made up of 150 former EPLF fighters who had defected to the government and some other carefully selected Eritreans. After being trained by airborne instructors, the silent patrol force was deployed to EPLF-held areas. At times, the force managed to bring back vital intelligence by kidnapping EPLF fighters and capturing documents.⁹

The combat intelligence units, on the other hand, were sent out to bring back information about the enemy's disposition and if necessary to test the opponents' strength through brief skirmishes. However, the combat reconnaissance units of even the higher army formations were ill-equipped, understaffed, and poorly trained. Although they were organized into platoons and companies, they usually faced a critical shortage of manpower, especially lack of combat engineers, drivers, mechanics, and communications personnel. In theory, they were supposed to use reconnaissance armored vehicles such as

the BRDM-2 and BTR-60. But army commanders quite often used such military vehicles for escort purposes.¹⁰

Worse still, the combat reconnaissance units were given obsolete radios whose spare parts were unavailable. Some of the radios had been in service for twenty-three to thirty years.¹¹ Writing to the vice defense minister for logistics and finance on March 6, 1988, the chief of military intelligence, Brigadier General Taddäsä T. Haymanot, lamented that the Military Intelligence unit was not in a position even “to properly and satisfactorily use those equipment that had been used during World War II.”¹² As a result, the reconnaissance units were unable to detect the locations of the insurgents’ communication equipment. Crippled by such problems, reconnaissance units were, in most cases, forced to retreat after provoking the rebels to open fire without gathering intelligence about command posts, fortifications, or disposition of fighters and weapons.¹³

Those areas that remained out of the reach of the reconnaissance units were left to the air force for aerial reconnoitering. But the insurgents usually kept their daytime movements to a minimum and camouflaged their heavy weapons, arms depots, and other underground installations to avoid detection. To make matters worse, there were no trained personnel in aerial photo analysis.¹⁴

The other branch with similar problems was the agent deployment section, usually known as covert operations. Like other branches of military intelligence, covert operations required special training. Unfortunately, however, the military intelligence school based at Hurso had suspended its training program in advanced military intelligence, POW interrogation, aerial photo analysis, and aerial reconnaissance for a decade, since 1974, due to a shortage of instructors and teaching materials.¹⁵ It was only in 1984 that the intelligence section began training officers in the collection, evaluation, interpretation, and dissemination of strategic and combat information. That training was an attempt to somehow mitigate some of the glaring problems of military intelligence.¹⁶

In the same year, Soviet military intelligence experts trained forty-seven officers in covert operations. They were soon assigned to recruit and deploy local agents on the Central Command, the FRA, and SRA fronts. A year later, some of the trained officers were sent to the Southern and Western Commands on a similar mission.¹⁷

The main objective of using local agents in intelligence-gathering was to plant local people in areas controlled or influenced by insurgents to get current information about the rebels’ movement and disposition as well as their intentions. Since local agents knew the culture and spoke the language, they could gather vital intelligence about the rebels without much difficulty. In the Ogadén, for instance, local Somali agents had managed to gather strategic and combat intelligence.¹⁸

Flawed intelligence

In the northern theater some attempts were made to gather intelligence through local agents. In 1984, the Military Intelligence Department set up local agent recruitment and deployment stations at Täsänäy, Bäréntu, Kärän, Qarora, Adi Qäyeh, Asmära (in Eritrea), Sheraro, Weqro, Chärchär (in Tigray), Tälämt, and Mätämma (in Gondär). It was decided to pay a local agent 2,870 birr (about U.S. \$1,390) monthly or 34,440 birr (about U.S. \$16,600) annually, an attractive incentive in those days for gathering timely intelligence.¹⁹ However, the allocated sum was seldom paid.

Moreover, the recruitment and deployment of local agents, particularly in Eritrea, was difficult and complicated. By and large, neither Military Intelligence nor the Military Security personnel could uncover underground EPLF cells. As a result, they could not know who was who in Eritrea. Still, the Military Intelligence Department set up its own clandestine cells by carefully recruiting local agents. But the Military Intelligence personnel were not in a position to ensure that these cells were free from double agents and EPLF infiltrators. For instance, there were forty-seven local (Eritrean) agents deployed to gather intelligence about the EPLF. Later, six agents were reported missing. Presumably, they had gone over to the EPLF once they accomplished their mission. Two other agents were neutralized by the EPLF: one was kidnapped and the other was shot dead by EPLF's underground assassination squad.²⁰

In spite of such problems, a few local agents managed to penetrate deep into EPLF-controlled areas and gathered essential intelligence about the insurgents. But for such a risky business, they were not paid what they had been promised. Although the government had authorized the payment of an attractive sum to local agents, some of the Eritreans who were gathering vital intelligence received as little as 75 birr (about U.S. \$36) per month. Since the whole operation was carried out in absolute secrecy, there was no way of ensuring the money allocated for local agents was safe from misuse and embezzlement. Low payment was, therefore, one of the reasons that led to a lack of commitment on the part of some of the local agents. In 1990, seven Eritrean agents were fired, mainly due to their lack of allegiance in intelligence-gathering. Obviously, there was every possibility for these former local agents to disclose the clandestine intelligence network. The Military Intelligence personnel should have been aware of the fact that the dismissal of agents could put the whole covert operation in jeopardy.²¹

The intelligence work by the interrogation department was even more flawed. Unlike the covert operation section, it was staffed with people without special training in interrogation techniques.²² If well treated and skillfully handled, POWs and defectors could give crucial information about the enemy. But Military Intelligence officers quite often failed to realize that mistreatment, intimidation, and insensitivity shown to POWs and defectors might

backfire. In 1985, a defector to the Central Command, for instance, told intelligence officers that the EPLF had already deployed a force to Mount Asäbot to blow up the Awash Bridge. Based on that wrong intelligence, the Central Command was duped into deploying troops to the area.²³

The Asäbot incident shows how wrong information could misguide Military Intelligence officers and army commanders. As a matter of fact, every bit of information obtained from various sources needs to be evaluated, experts say, for its “pertinence, reliability and accuracy.”²⁴ Evaluation helps intelligence officers to “separate the wheat from the chaff.” Instead of accepting whatever information is gathered, Allen Dulles, a long-time director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), advises intelligence officers to believe that “all overt information is grist for the intelligence mill.” He adds, “Trained personnel are required to cull it in order to find the grain of wheat in the mountain of chaff.”²⁵

Ethiopia’s intelligence evaluation and dissemination section was supposed to act as the “intelligence mill.” Before being disseminated to officials and commanders concerned, the information coming from reconnaissance units, local agents, POWs, defectors, and radio interception should be recorded, evaluated, and interpreted. But that was not always the case. If intelligence officers received a warning about an immediate threat to national security, the information would swiftly be sent to concerned bodies without being processed.²⁶

Apart from such emergency situations, the information gathered from various sources was evaluated and analyzed before being used as intelligence. In most cases, however, by the time it reached commanders and officials, it would lose its validity due to the delay in evaluation and interpretation. Commanders frequently complained that they were receiving historical records about insurgents but not current intelligence.²⁷

Intelligence of a strategic nature was passed on to the education and research section. This section was supposed to conduct research to find out the capabilities and vulnerabilities of insurgents as well as those of hostile neighboring states. Such research would help the government formulate and shape its defense policy.²⁸

The third section attached to the Military Intelligence Department was the radio interception branch. The branch’s personnel were supposed to intercept, study, and decipher enemy signal communications. This section, too, was crippled, in this case by a shortage of code analysts, multilingual experts, and cryptographers. As a result, the section found it difficult to decipher the intricate communication codes of the TPLF and EPLF.²⁹

Achievements of the Military Intelligence Department

Despite its multidimensional problems, the Military Intelligence Department occasionally accomplished some remarkable successes. One such suc-

cess that can be singled out as an exceptional achievement was the disclosure of Somalia's plan to invade Ethiopia some six months before the full-scale Somali offensive. A certain army officer registered as a civilian staff member of the Ethiopian embassy in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, was gathering combat and strategic intelligence about Somalia's armed forces. Following the outbreak of hostilities, the Ethiopian air force did a remarkable job of intelligence-gathering by undertaking risky missions. Fighter and reconnaissance planes flew deep into Somalia's airspace and took vital aerial photographs of airfields, ports, military depots, and convoys, which were bombarded in due course.³⁰

Another success in intelligence-gathering was achieved in the northern theater. The Ethiopian embassy in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, and the Consular Office at Kassala in eastern Sudan occasionally managed to gather essential intelligence mainly about the ELF, EPLF, and TPLF. Using embassy and covert operation sources, the Military Intelligence Department succeeded in identifying the precise geographical positioning (latitudes and longitudes) of EPLF command headquarters, radio stations, arms depots, field hospitals, garages, workshops, prisons, and flour mills. However, these critical targets were either deliberately hidden in mountainside tunnels or inside Sudanese territory to avoid air strikes.³¹

In 1980, a significant incident revealed the activities of the EPLF further. That was the defection of Tāklay G. Maryam, an EPLF Central Committee member in charge of internal security, to the Ethiopian government. Nicknamed "Aden" because he had briefly stayed in the capital of South Yemen, Tāklay brought with him priceless information about the EPLF. This included the Front's political and military organization, its intelligence network, and the disposition of its fighters, as well as its underground headquarters, workshops, hospitals, arms depots, and other installations. Tāklay even handed over minutes of the EPLF Central Committee meetings held in 1979. Although Military Intelligence personnel were excited by Tāklay's inside information, they were surprised to learn that those EPLF POWs detained at Sämbäl prison had maintained contacts with EPLF clandestine cells in Asmära.³² Frightened by the revelation of its particularly critical targets, Dan Connell says, the EPLF had to "relocate every one of them from command headquarters to the workshops, schools, hospitals and prisoner-of-war camps" as a precaution against aerial bombardment.³³ Likewise, the Military Intelligence Department succeeded in uncovering the manpower and firepower of the TPLF, EPDM, OLF, and ALF as well as the organizational structure of the TPLF, its political leaders and military commanders, its dealings with foreign companies for the purchase of weapons, and the exact locations of its arms depots.³⁴

The Military Intelligence Department at times succeeded in uncovering the insurgents' plan of operation. On several occasions, Military Intelligence

warned commanders of impending attacks by rebels. But commanders quite often failed to prevent the looming military disaster. Four months before the fall of Afabét, the military intelligence branch of the SRA, for example, discovered that the EPLF was planning to mount a major offensive against the Nadāw Command after cutting off its supply route. That information was presented at the November 1987 meeting of army commanders held in Asmāra. Nevertheless, the senior commanders discarded the intelligence as groundless. According to the chief of the military intelligence at the time, some senior commanders, especially those who were later involved in the 1989 coup attempt, were indifferent to such vital intelligence.³⁵

Days before the attack on the Nadāw Command, the EPLF preparation became more visible to the military intelligence section of the SRA. Intelligence officers received reports about the transportation of arms by the EPLF to the areas close to Afabét. Soon after receiving such reports, the commander of the SRA, Brigadier General Wubātu Ṣäggayé, discerned that the EPLF was ready to mount a major offensive. He warned the Nadāw Command of the impending danger, saying, "It appears that this concentration of the enemy is intended to hit Nadāw from the rear and . . . to close off the Keren-Af Abet road."³⁶ That was exactly what happened twenty-four hours later. Although the Military Intelligence personnel warned beforehand about the danger on the horizon, no effective measure was taken to save Nadāw from destruction.³⁷

Some six months after the destruction of the Nadāw Command, SRA's military intelligence received another warning of an EPLF-planned attack on the naval base at Meṣewa. The information was obtained from a local agent on the Military Intelligence payroll ten days before the attack. The Military Intelligence Department dutifully and immediately warned the naval headquarters, the SRA, the Operations Department, and the Sixth Division of an impending EPLF attack on the warships at the naval base.³⁸ This time, too, no measure was taken to tighten the security around the naval base. On September 7, 1988, at 0300 hours, six EPLF speedboats attacked the base. Before that incident, it was the navy's regular routine to perform sea patrols in three rings. But the navy suspended its regular patrolling activities on that particular night instead of stepping up security measures. That suspension leads some people to suspect sabotage, along with the fact that the navy's radar detected the EPLF boats only when they were trying to escape after the attack. Although the damage to the naval base was reported to be minor, it was another failure to make use of timely intelligence submitted in advance by Military Intelligence.³⁹

On two other occasions, the Military Intelligence unit received reliable and accurate information about the EPRDF's plans to launch an operation on the Guna and Lāmi fronts. The intelligence about the second offensive on the Guna front was obtained from the radio interception section. On January 9, 1990, the radio operators received a coded message transmitted by the

EPDM leader, Tamrat Layné, to companions named Taddäsä, Helawé, and Osman. When deciphered, the message revealed that the insurgents were planning to launch a second offensive on the Guna front by transferring fighters from the Kuta Bär and Hayq fronts.⁴⁰ The intelligence was soon disseminated to the 603rd Corps. After six weeks, the rebels launched the second offensive on the Guna front. The 603rd Corps had ample time to get ready for the impending onslaught but neglected to do so. Despite an earlier warning by Military Intelligence, commanders once again failed to prevent a military disaster.⁴¹

Three months after the EPRDF's second offensive on the Guna front, local sources alerted the Military Intelligence Department about a planned attack on the 102nd Airborne Division at Lämi. Just two days before that attack, an EPRDF fighter captured during a reconnaissance mission confirmed the warning. In spite of this vital intelligence at hand, the Airborne Division suffered almost 50 percent casualties during the three days of fighting between May 22 and 24, 1990.⁴² Success on the part of Military Intelligence in uncovering the intentions of the insurgents was undermined by the failure of army commanders in making use of timely intelligence.

Intelligence failures

History provides us many extraordinary examples of intelligence failures. This may lead us to accept what Richard Betts declares: "Intelligence failures are not only inevitable, they are natural."⁴³ Israel is believed to have an intelligence service with proverbial efficiency and competence. And yet, it failed to warn the Israeli government about the surprise attack by Egypt and Syria that took place on October 6, 1973.⁴⁴ Even more surprisingly, the intelligence services of the most powerful nation on earth, the United States, failed to prevent the 9/11 attack on its own territory.⁴⁵

If such world-class intelligence services are struck by failures of one sort or another, it might not thus be surprising to find similar setbacks in Ethiopian military intelligence. One major failure that brought about disastrous consequences was the inability of the intelligence officers to uncover the clandestine ELF and EPLF cells entrenched in Asmāra and other towns. In the 1970s, these underground ELF and EPLF members were smuggling money (from government banks, using forged documents), medical supplies, spare parts, shoes, and clothes (from state-owned factories) out of Asmāra undetected. In addition, they gunned down several army officers in Asmāra.⁴⁶

With the help of these secret cells, the EPLF later mounted commando attacks on government targets in Asmāra. The first in a series of operations was carried out in the night of July 15, 1977, when EPLF fighters stormed the Sāmbäl Prison in Asmāra and freed about eight hundred political prisoners.⁴⁷ Nine years later, the TPLF mounted a similar nocturnal raid on Mäqälé prison

and freed nearly 1,300 political prisoners.⁴⁸ In both cases, Military Intelligence personnel received no information whatsoever about the planning of the operations. They were as stunned as the general public when they heard the news.⁴⁹

In 1984, the Military Intelligence Department failed to sense that a much more dangerous operation was in the making in Eritrea. This time, the EPLF leaders were planning to destroy all military aircraft at Asmara airport. Undercover EPLF members and agents working in the air force and the air traffic control section as well as those who had been living around the airport were assigned to compile and submit reports about the main targets. In the meantime, the EPLF was training commandos in absolute secrecy for the operation.⁵⁰ While EPLF members were smuggling messages out of Asmara, a letter containing a hand-drawn map of the airport with some notes fell into the hands of the Military Security people at a checkpoint. An EPLF undercover agent who had served in the Ethiopian air force for twenty-one years wrote the letter. He was also at the time a member of the Commission to Organize the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE), which Mengestu had created to gain political control over the population and popular support for his regime.⁵¹

The Military Security and Military Intelligence officers failed to identify the writer of the message. Even then, the message should have been a clue that the EPLF was planning an attack on the airport. At about the same time, the veterans stationed around the airport were complaining that, since they had sight problems at night due to old age, younger soldiers should replace them. Sadly enough, despite the clues at hand, the officials and commanders in Asmara failed to tighten the security around the airport.⁵²

Aware of the deficiency of Military Intelligence and Military Security, the same EPLF undercover agent prepared another sketch map of the airport and smuggled it out of Asmara. The sketch was carefully folded and inserted into the wooden handle of an ax, which was then carried through a checkpoint on the shoulder of an EPLF member disguised as a peasant. Once the planning of the operation was over, the commandos entered Asmara in various guises. A few of them were even allowed to get into the airport under the pretext of welcoming a guest from Addis Ababa.⁵³

Finally on May 20, 1984, just before midnight, sixteen EPLF commandos slipped into the airport without much difficulty and carried out their mission within eighteen minutes. According to EPLF sources, the commandos destroyed twenty-eight to thirty-three airplanes.⁵⁴ Even though one might argue that the EPLF claim was exaggerated, MOND's classified documents reveal that a total of eighteen military aircraft were put out of action (ten destroyed and eight damaged).⁵⁵

Strangely enough, the Military Intelligence and Military Security personnel seemed to learn little or nothing from this monumental intelligence

failure. Following the commando attack, no measure was taken to tighten the security around the airport. No wall was built to protect the military aircraft not only from view but also from attack. Nor were the residential houses around the airport relocated. The nearby Asmāra-Māndāfāra road was not diverted away from the airport. To make matters worse, the manpower of the Fifteenth Veterans Brigade, which guarded the airport, had already declined from 2,961 to 884 men. In 1986 alone, 327 veterans were discharged from the brigade due to old age. By 1986, therefore, the security of the airport was in an even worse situation.⁵⁶

Making the most out of such security and intelligence failures, the EPLF commandos penetrated the airport zone once again on the night of January 14, 1986, and fired B-10 antitank and RPG-7 shells for thirty minutes. This time, they mounted their attack from a distance of five hundred meters and could only destroy one MiG-21 fighter jet and damage five others.⁵⁷ But the EPLF claimed that its commandos had destroyed a total of forty-four military aircraft.⁵⁸

The commando raids on Asmāra airport resulted from intelligence incompetence and lack of imagination to figure out the intentions of the insurgents. There were also occasions when the Military Intelligence personnel were duped by wrong information deliberately fabricated by the rebels. Two typical incidents are worth mentioning. On January 7, 1985, three TPLF brigades mounted a surprise attack on a small government force (with only 327 men) stationed at Dabat. A week earlier, the insurgents deliberately fed Military Intelligence in Gondār wrong information through their agents, warning that the TPLF was ready to attack Addis Zāmān and block the Addis Ababa-Gondār road. On January 3, an army was deployed to the areas between Addis Zāmān and Ebennat. It was after the attack on Dabat that Military Intelligence came to realize that the information it had received was just a decoy.⁵⁹

Dismayed by this intelligence failure, Major General Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, then the chief of staff, communicated his frustration to the North-Western Command in the following manner:

Our difficulty of gathering intelligence is becoming a problem with no solution. Our problem is not only the failure to get accurate intelligence but also the deployment of troops based on wrong information. When the rebels planned to attack Dabat, they fed us wrong information . . . As a result, we deployed the army . . . to an area where there was no threat.⁶⁰

Having failed to overrun the army's defenses, the insurgents withdrew from Dabat after six days of fierce fighting.⁶¹

The Dabat incident could have been a lasting lesson not to deploy army units based on unconfirmed intelligence coming from local agents. Never-

theless, the intelligence failure in the North-Western Command was repeated in a neighboring army formation, the Tigray Command. Nearly two years after the attack on Dabat, the military intelligence section of the Seventeenth Division based in Sheré was duped by wrong information received from a local informer who was later found to be a double agent. The double agent reported that a TPLF force estimated to consist of a battalion and two companies was stationed at Sänqata. The information should have been critically evaluated for accuracy and reliability. But based on this unconfirmed report, Brigadier General Ar'aya Zär'ay, commander of the Seventeenth Division, deployed the Nineteenth Brigade to the area. The insurgents, who had been kept informed about developments, ambushed the brigade at a strategic pass near Endabaguna on November 8, 1987. The brigade suffered heavy casualties. The division commander was held responsible for the disaster and was given a strong warning.⁶²

Despite the exchange of angry letters between commanders concerning the Endabaguna incident, the intelligence failure in Tigray worsened following the formation of the TRA in April 1988. The TRA's military intelligence service was so weak that it could not even find out the location of the TPLF brigades and divisions.⁶³ Having discovered the infiltration of the army based in Sheré by the TPLF, the Military Security Organization arrested some students, teachers, and soldiers.⁶⁴ But neither the Military Security nor the Military Intelligence services could uncover the smuggling of fighters and arms into Enda Sellasé by the TPLF days before the Battle of Sheré in February 1989. Weapons were, for instance, smuggled by fighters who entered Enda Sellasé disguised as peasants selling firewood and straw.⁶⁵ The Intelligence and Security people could not sniff out these activities that had been taking place under their noses. In fact, the ad hoc committee set up to investigate the causes of the destruction of the 604th Corps pointed out intelligence failure as one of the contributing factors.⁶⁶

Counterintelligence

Counterintelligence is an essential aspect of military intelligence. Gathering intelligence about the enemy may be pointless without guarding one's own secrets and protecting one's own personnel from hostile infiltration. According to the U.S. Army field manual, the principal purpose of counterintelligence is, therefore, "to safeguard information, personnel, material and installations against the espionage, sabotage or subversive activities of foreign powers and dissatisfied or dissident groups or individuals which constitute a threat to the national security."⁶⁷ Counterintelligence personnel are required, as Allen Dulles says, to "locate, identify and neutralize" such threats.⁶⁸

The Ethiopian military intelligence establishment was no different from this conventional system. Until 1980, the Military Intelligence Department

was also performing counterintelligence activities. In 1980, the Military Security Organization (MSO) was created under the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the support of the KGB, the Soviet secret service. Once the MSO inserted itself into the military hierarchy from the brigade level upward, it took over counterintelligence activities from the Military Intelligence Department.⁶⁹

Officers who received specialized training in military security and intelligence at Hurso and in the Soviet Union were attached to army units as military security personnel. Among other things, they were expected to protect the army from infiltration by insurgents, recruitment by foreign secret services, hostile propaganda and control plots, and mutinies; and to stop desertion of troops to the rebels.⁷⁰

The Military Security service was, however, in bad shape to carry out this huge and challenging task. Above all, the security department was understaffed. For instance, there was only one security officer in a brigade.⁷¹ By 1989, there were only 550 security personnel in the ground forces,⁷² whose manpower had reached nearly half a million, 497,237 men to be exact.⁷³ In terms of ratio, that would mean there was one security officer or NCO to vigilantly follow up the activities of 904 troops and watch out for an unknown number of infiltrators.

The problem was compounded by the intricate intelligence network of the insurgents and their undetectable infiltration techniques as well as effective counterintelligence measures. These advantages enabled the rebels to always maintain an edge over the government's Military Intelligence and Military Security services.⁷⁴

Some of the intelligence and counterintelligence techniques employed by the insurgents illustrate the challenges of the Military Security service. Perhaps the most serious challenge of the Military Security personnel was to crack down on the underground cells maintained by the rebels in urban centers and their innumerable infiltrators and agents planted in the armed forces as well as in various government offices. All these clandestine members, infiltrators, and agents constantly fed the insurgents all sorts of intelligence. The government itself admitted that its security services had failed to untie the intelligence knot of the rebels.⁷⁵

Classified documents explicitly acknowledge the exceptional success of the insurgents, more particularly the EPLF, in training and employing women for intelligence-gathering. There is now conclusive evidence supported by the Eritreans themselves confirming that the EPLF was using women in all walks of life, including housewives married to military personnel, bartenders, waitresses, civil servants, and daily laborers to spy on the armed forces (see Appendix VI).⁷⁶ A retired army general has this to say by way of corroboration: "Any force left in the field long enough will take girlfriends and mistresses, forming complex local bonds. In Eritrea, the beautiful bar girls and waitresses usually worked for the EPLF passing on careless gossip and boastful pillow

talk. The Eritreans were very good at using their women.”⁷⁷ With the wisdom of hindsight, another general regrets: “When we went to bars for a drink, we took with us our offices [that is, our secrets], forgetting the fact that the people around us, including the guards and waitresses, were EPLF informers. Obviously, when one got drunk, one would disclose military secrets.”⁷⁸

In addition to agents working in bars and hotels, the insurgents are reported to have employed shoeshine boys, street vendors, shepherds, priests, craftsmen, and even individuals who pretended to be insane for intelligence-gathering.⁷⁹ For instance, a former EPRDF spy confesses that, disguising himself as a shoeshine boy, he gathered intelligence about the army for four months at Woldya and for three months in Dässé. During that period, he had access to army headquarters. Since he was given some training in cartography, he could prepare sketch maps locating the disposition of troops and weapons. The Military Security personnel never suspected him.⁸⁰

The Military Security service also failed to discern that the insurgents could smuggle women fighters into some strategic towns for the purpose of intelligence-gathering. In 1990, the EPRDF sent two women fighters on a special mission to Alām Kātāma and Lāmi. The fighters disguised themselves as peasant women going to town on a market day. Once they entered Alām Kātāma, they got jobs as daily laborers with local beer sellers. Since soldiers frequented the beerhouses, the women began to gather bits and pieces of information while roasting grain and grinding *gesho* (a plant whose dried, ground leaves are added to beer to raise the alcohol content). Every night, they recorded what they had learned on strips of paper that they carefully hid inside their dresses. During their return trip, they were worried about tight security. To avoid suspicion, they decided not to wear underpants, because peasant women did not wear them. To pass the checkpoint unsuspected, the EPRDF agents rolled and slightly chewed the pieces of paper and then inserted them inside their vaginas. That technique worked well. On another mission to Lāmi, they put their small pieces of paper inside fresh butter and successfully smuggled out intelligence about the airborne division stationed there. The Military Security personnel never learned of these missions.⁸¹

The Military Security Organization also found it difficult to protect the army from infiltrators and agents working for the insurgents. Infiltration had reached such an astonishing degree that even the president’s office was not immune from it. At one point, both Māngestu and Brigadier General Taddāsā T. Haymanot, the MOND’s chief of military intelligence, could not help being dumbfounded that the EPLF knew about an angry exchange of words between the president and Major General Fanta Bālay, an argument that was highly private and confidential.⁸²

The MOND’s classified documents shed some light on the EPLF methods of recruiting agents and infiltrating the army. According to these documents, the EPLF carefully studied those privates, NCOs, and officers who habitually

drank too much or committed adultery. The EPLF painstakingly approached them by making their preferences—alcohol or women—readily available so as to milk vital intelligence from them.⁸³ Military Security personnel quite often tried to track down such members of the army who were in touch with the insurgents. But, on the whole, they failed to cut off such secret links.⁸⁴

There were also senior army commanders and operation officers who leaked information to the insurgents, either out of hatred for Māngestu or due to other personal motives, such as sympathy for the rebels or war-weariness. Ironically, the army had already been betrayed by some of its commanders. Yevgeny Sokurov, a KGB officer who was training commandos near Asmāra, reveals:

[The] disillusioned members of the SRA's high command . . . were deliberately sabotaging the war effort. No matter how secret the operation, it was becoming known to the separatists. The commanders were supplying the separatists with information about their activities because they wanted to damage Mengistu's regime, even if it meant the slaughter of their subordinates.⁸⁵

Some disgruntled operations officers were also reported to have sold plans of operations to the insurgents. In one of the operations around Meṣewa, an EPLF briefcase full of top-secret documents fell into the hands of airborne troops. One of the documents dealt with negotiations on the amount to be paid for an operations officer who had already agreed to hand over a plan of operation, along with a topographical map, to the EPLF.⁸⁶

Apart from such secret dealings, there were occasions when the army's own personnel exposed its secrets. As the army was approaching its demise, military discipline reached alarming depths. The problem came to engulf radio operators. In 1989, there were frequent reports about ill-disciplined radio operators who used plain language to transmit top military secrets.⁸⁷ By intercepting these messages, the EPLF and TPLF could warn their fighters to take the necessary precautions whenever fighter or reconnaissance aircraft took off. The radio operators and cryptanalysts of the insurgents are said to have been able not only to decipher almost all coded messages but also to identify army commanders by their voices.⁸⁸ The situation became so hopeless that some important secrets fell into the hands of the insurgents before reaching government army units.⁸⁹ The Military Security Organization was expected to punish those responsible for the breach of confidentiality. But the classified documents do not reveal any corrective measures taken by the Military Security Organization.

Still another responsibility of the Military Security Organization was to protect combatants from hostile propaganda. Whenever government defense lines were within its reach, the EPLF placed megaphones on trees and hills

and tried to broadcast its propaganda so as to erode the will of government troops to fight.⁹⁰ After 1988, EPLF and TPLF radio programs began to attract listeners even among government soldiers. Although listening to hostile radio propaganda could result in severe punishment by the Military Security Organization, combatants continued to do so.⁹¹

On the other hand, the government itself allowed hostile propaganda to take effect among the rank and file by redeploying former POWs who had been captured and released by the insurgents after being politicized. The propaganda these former POWs spread is reported to have undermined the fighting spirit of many combatants and led them to believe that surrender was not at all dreadful. Between 1989 and 1991, more and more troops took that option, thereby precipitating the collapse of the army.⁹²

Fighting on Two Fronts (1977–1978)

The Somali-Ethiopian War

Since its independence in 1960, the Republic of Somalia had dreamed of unifying all the ethnic Somalis living in the Horn of Africa. Although the republics of Djibouti and Kenya also had sizable populations of Somalis, it was the Ogadén region of Ethiopia, where more than 90 percent of the people were Somalis, that became the main target of Somalia's territorial claims. Just four years after its independence, Somalia attempted to grab the Ogadén. But the dream of seizing the Ogadén was frustrated when the Ethiopian army swiftly beat off the Somali invaders in 1964. Since then, Somalia had been biding its time until an ideal situation came up to realize its dream.¹

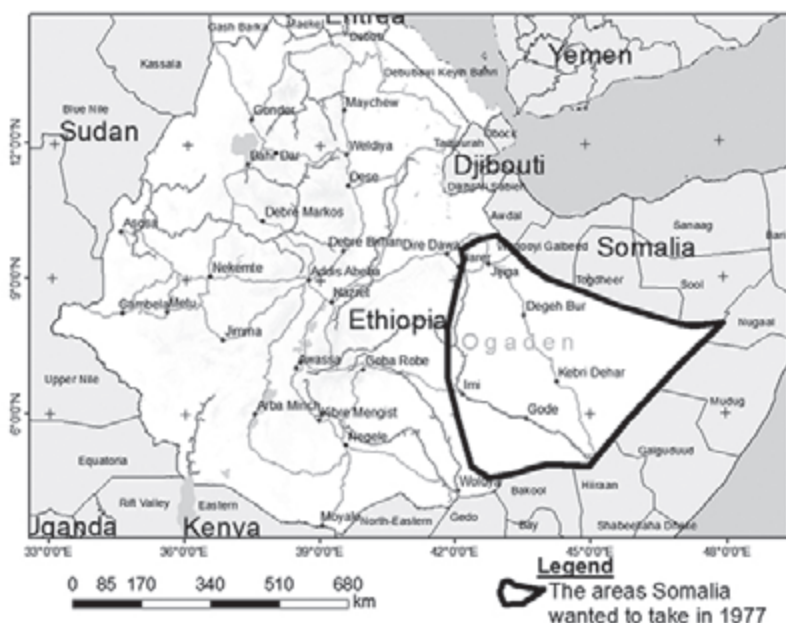
Such an opportunity presented itself for Somalia in 1977 as the new military government of Ethiopia was beset by what looked like insurmountable difficulties. At the center, the EPRP waged urban terrorism against the Därg while the Därg itself was locked in an internal power struggle. In northern Ethiopia, the Eritrean insurgents overran several garrison towns and besieged Bäréntu, Meşewa, and Asmära. In northwestern Gondär, another opposition group, the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), was waging armed struggle against the Därg. In addition, the ALF, OLF, and TPLF contributed to mounting tension by carrying out ambushes and small-scale operations.²

Worse still, as pointed out earlier, the United States, which had been supplying military hardware to the Ethiopian armed forces for twenty-four years, dropped Ethiopia from the list of recipients of American weaponry. This abrupt decision was effected by the new Jimmy Carter administration, which accused the Därg of "horrendous human rights crimes."³ It seemed abundantly clear to the Somali government that, by 1977, the Ethiopian army was overstretched, under-equipped, and highly vulnerable to external invasion. For Somalia, it was a golden opportunity to rout the Ethiopian army and take the Ogadén.⁴

The Ogadén lowlands stretch from Karra Mara Mountains in the north to Férfér in the south, and from the Wabé Shäbällé River in the west to the tip

of the Ethiopia-Somalia border in the east. Inhabited by ethnic Somalis, this vast and arid stretch of land got its name from its largest clan, the Ogadén. In 1977, the Somali government was determined to occupy areas well beyond the Ogadén as far as Sidamo and the Awash River, where pockets of Somali minorities lived.⁵

Map 1. The approximate areas Somalia wanted to take during the 1977–1978 war.



Before launching a full-scale invasion, the Mogadishu government equipped and supported two separatist rebel groups, the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) and the Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF), in 1975. Trained and armed by the Somali government, the WSLF and the SALF were respectively placed under Somalia's Northern Command based in Hargeisa and the Southern Command stationed at Baidoa. The guerrillas received orders from Lieutenant General Muhammad Ali Samatar, the Somali minister of defense.⁶ Although the guerrillas operated as what Patrick Gilkes calls "the irregular units of the Somali army," the Mogadishu government tried to deceive the outside world into believing that their movement was a home-grown insurgency.⁷

Whatever the Somali government claimed, the guerrillas were trained and commanded by Somali officers. Training included assaulting and ambush-

ing army and police units, laying land mines, and destroying tanks.⁸ With regard to their zones of operation, the WSLF was supposed to carry out guerrilla activities in the Ogaḍén and highland Harärgé, while the SALF was assigned to harass government outposts in Balé and Sidamo. However, their zones of operation usually overlapped, and that led to rivalry between the two guerrilla groups. Both groups are reported to have started operations in early 1976. While operating in the Ogaḍén, the WSLF faced little problem winning the support and sympathy of the Somali population due to its ethnic, religious, and cultural affinity with them. The SALF, however, found it difficult to mobilize the rural population of southern Ethiopia, mainly owing to the popularity of the land proclamation issued by the Därg in March 1975 that redistributed large landholdings among peasants who had been landless. Both the WSLF and the SALF carried out guerrilla operations, demolishing government structures, harassing isolated army and police units, and terrorizing the local population. More particularly, guerrillas slaughtered Christian settlers in Harärgé, Balé, and Sidamo and looted or destroyed their property.⁹

By the end of 1976, the guerrillas stepped up their operations throughout the Ogaḍén and in the lowlands of Balé and Sidamo. The police and army units scattered in the remote corners of Harärgé, Balé, and Sidamo were ill-prepared to beat off the guerrillas. They had to retreat to garrison towns such as Godé, Wardér, Awaré, Qäbri Dähar, Dägähabur, El Karré, Filtu, and Nägällé. The guerrillas were mostly armed with AK-47 and M-16 assault rifles. Once they attacked isolated police posts and army units, they swiftly dispersed to avoid reprisal air strikes by the Ethiopian air force. A steady flow of arms from Somalia encouraged the guerrillas to intensify their operations. According to MOND reports, by 1977, the guerrillas were estimated at 63,000 men.¹⁰

The guerrillas began to disrupt surface transport to and from garrison towns. Military as well as civilian vehicles were either ambushed or destroyed by land mines. Moving along the Harär-Jijiga (105 kilometers) and the Jijiga-Dägähabur (167 kilometers) roads became increasingly dangerous. On February 11, 1977, for instance, the guerrillas ambushed military vehicles along the Jijiga-Dägähabur road, killing twenty-five and wounding twenty-four soldiers. Sometime later, they intercepted a police unit near Filtu in southeastern Sidamo and killed all its members. The garrison towns in the Ogaḍén as well as in the lowlands of Balé and Sidamo were, in most cases, put under siege. In April 1977, the WSLF guerrillas took control of Sägäg in the heart of the Ogaḍén.¹¹

Eritrea's struggle for independence

The military situation in Eritrea was no better. By early 1977, the insurgents had already captured most of the garrison towns and tightened the siege of the provincial capital, Asmära. The army on both fronts was on the verge of

collapse. Worse still, the power struggle within the Därg had undermined military leadership. On February 3, 1977, however, Mängestu H. Maryam emerged as undisputed head of the military government by summarily executing seven Därg members. Then the government began to take swift measures to avoid the army's total defeat on both fronts. One such measure was embarking on the training of a huge militia force at a new camp named Tatäq ("get armed") a few kilometers west of Addis Ababa.¹² A year earlier, the Därg had gathered tens of thousands of peasants from the northern provinces and sent them off to the northern front to wipe out the Eritrean insurgents. The peasants had received no training in counterinsurgency, and they were armed with obsolete rifles. As a result, the rebels decimated them even before they crossed into Eritrea. The peasant march, known as Operation Raza, was thus a complete failure.¹³

In an attempt to rectify earlier mistakes, the government brought Cuban instructors to train the new people's militia at Tatäq. Once peasants were recruited from all over the country, training began at the end of April 1977. In two rounds between April 1977 and January 1978, the government prepared and deployed a total of 143,350 militiamen.¹⁴ But the Därg had publicly declared that it was training an army of 300,000 peasants (imitating the Red Army created by the Soviets),¹⁵ probably to boost the morale of the troops fighting on both fronts and to terrify the Somalis as well as the northern insurgents.

The Därg turns to the Soviets

Arming the people's militia was a serious challenge for the government at a time when Ethiopia had no major arms supplier. The United States had already terminated the shipment of American weapons to Ethiopia by the end of April 1977.¹⁶ The American government is even said to have denied Ethiopia the armaments it had already paid for.¹⁷

The freezing of American arms deliveries forced the Därg to make an immediate deal with the Soviet Union. Accordingly, during his visit to Moscow, Mängestu signed a military aid agreement with the Soviet leaders in May 1977.¹⁸ However, the agreement did not lead to immediate shipment of weapons to Ethiopia. Until the acquisition of Soviet weaponry, the Därg tried to purchase arms from China, North Korea, and Israel.¹⁹

Though the Därg managed to procure small arms from several sources, it pinned its hope on the Soviet Union for the delivery of heavy weapons. Despite the signing of the second Ethiopian-Soviet agreement in May 1977, however, Ethiopian intelligence sources revealed that the Soviets had continued to deliver weapons and spare parts to Somalia and that Soviet military personnel were still actively serving as advisers in Somalia. This news filled officials of the Därg with dismay.²⁰

Emboldened by the continuous flow of Soviet arms to Somalia, the WSLF

guerrillas under the command of a Somali officer attacked the Diré Dawa airfield and damaged several airplanes on May 31, 1977. This attack was an attempt to incapacitate the Ethiopian air force before the impending full-scale invasion.²¹ On the next day, the guerrillas blew up three bridges along the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway. Since the bulk of the country's import-export trade passed through the port of Djibouti, the attack was intended to strangle the Ethiopian economy.²²

Somalia invades

While such terrorist attacks were being carried out, the Mogadishu government had already amassed men and arms for a full-scale invasion. According to Ethiopian military intelligence, by July 1977, Somalia had eighteen infantry, ten motorized, four artillery, three tank, three commando, and two mechanized brigades put under four commands. These forty brigades were armed with 344 tanks, 736 artillery and mortars, and 340 armored vehicles and were supported by 49 combat aircraft. In terms of manpower, apart from the 63,000 guerrillas, there were 50,000 regular troops, 80,000 militia, and 15,000 policemen.²³

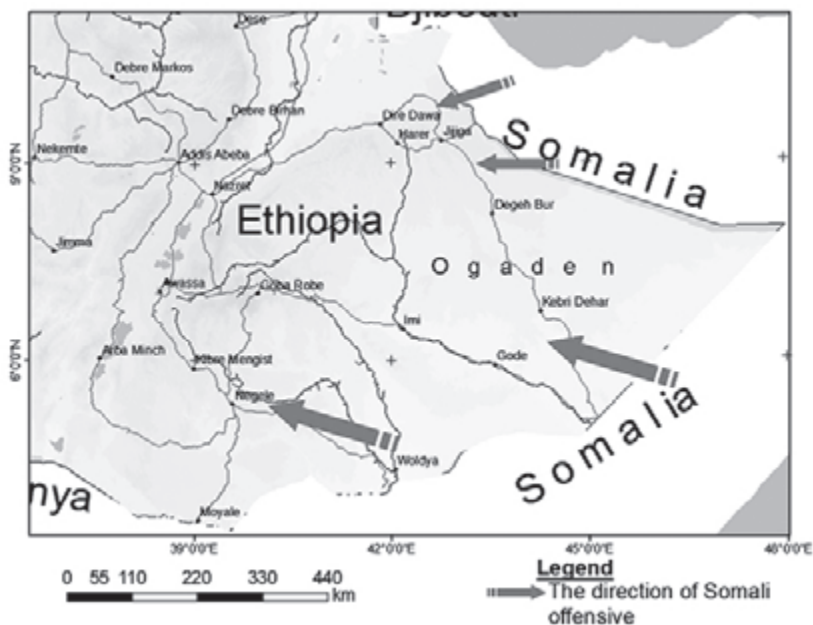
Arrayed against such a huge force were Ethiopia's three infantry brigades, a mechanized brigade, two tank and two artillery battalions, and two air defense batteries with a total of 9,722 regular troops and 498 policemen. These army and paramilitary units were scattered all over the vast plains of the Ogadén. While the Tenth Mechanized Brigade was stationed at Jijiga, the Fifth, Ninth, and Eleventh Infantry Brigades were respectively based at Godé, Qäbri Dähar, and Dägähabur. In addition, an infantry battalion was stationed at each frontier outpost, such as Awaré, Wardér, Gäladin, and Mustahil. All these army units were placed under the Third Division, headquartered in Harär.²⁴

The Somali government appeared to believe that its forces could easily overrun the defenses of those isolated units in the Ogadén. Although preparation for a full-scale invasion was at its height, the Soviets assured the Ethiopian government that Somalia would not attack. Taking the Soviet assurance for granted, the Ethiopian government transferred the Ninth Mechanized Battalion based at Jijiga to Eritrea. Likewise, the Gäset artillery unit of the Third Division was moved to Gondär to fight off the EDU forces that had already advanced as far as Tekel Dengay, not far from Gondär. The Thirty-Third Infantry Battalion was also taken from the Ogadén and deployed in the Afar lowlands to hunt down guerrillas. The Sixth and Twenty-Fifth Infantry Battalions had already left the Ogadén two years earlier for south Gondär to crush the forces of *Gerazmach* Admasu Bälay, former secretary of Däbrä Tabor *Awrajja*, who had rebelled in 1975 against the Därg. The transfer of all these army units to other fronts further weakened Ethiopian defenses in the Ogadén and created an ideal situation for the Somali invasion.²⁵

MOND classified documents reveal that the full-scale Somali invasion came on Tuesday, July 12, 1977. The date of the invasion was not, therefore, July 13 or July 23 as some authors have claimed. The four-pronged Somali offensive was directed to Diré Dawa, Jijiga, Godé-Qäbri Dähar, and Nägallé.²⁶

At the beginning of the invasion, the Somalis had numerical and technical superiority in main battle tanks, artillery, armored vehicles, and combat aircraft. For instance, Soviet-made T-54 and T-55 main battle tanks had, in Gebru's words, "bigger guns, better armour, greater range and more maneuverability than Ethiopia's aging M-41 and M-47 [American-made] tanks."²⁷ Similarly, Ethiopia's American-made 155mm artillery pieces were outmaneuvered and outranged by Somalia's Soviet-made 122mm D-30 field howitzer guns. Over the years, the Soviets had been arming Somalia's military forces with the latest weapons. Somali commanders calculated that their stockpiles of Soviet arsenal would enable them to successfully wage war for six months. They anticipated that once the Soviets learned of the invasion, they might terminate the flow of arms and spare parts to Somalia. The Somali objective was thus to occupy the whole of the Ogadén and the neighboring Somali-inhabited areas by December 1977, before the suspension of Soviet weapons shipments could have a serious impact on their offensive. The Somali calculation was almost accurate, and the anticipated Soviet arms cuts did happen.²⁸

Map 2. The Somali offensive in July–August 1977.



The Somali lightning offensive was accompanied by mechanized assaults, artillery barrages, and air strikes. Though immensely outnumbered and outgunned by the Somalis, the Ethiopian army units stationed at Wardér, Qābri Dāhar, and Godé managed to resist the assailants for twelve days with the close support of the air force. Since the Somalis had cut off supply routes between Harär and the garrison towns, it became increasingly difficult to reinforce and supply those isolated army units in the Ogadén. The evacuation of civilians from the garrison towns was equally challenging. Soon after the fall of the Godé airport into Somali hands, the government rushed a militia brigade and an infantry company to Godé to reinforce the army there. However, whether by accident or design, the Seventy-Ninth Militia Brigade received the wrong bullets, which rendered the reinforcement useless. Having suffered heavy losses, the army at Godé retreated in disorder to Dānan on July 14, 1977. While moving to Qābri Dāhar to join the Ninth Brigade, troops of the Fifth Brigade were informed about the evacuation of the garrison town. They were ordered to retreat to Sägäg. But they got lost in the wilderness, and it was only through the guidance of airplanes that they could finally reach Harär. The battalions at El Kärré and Imi were also told to retreat to Bälé and Ginir.²⁹

The Twenty-Second Battalion at Wardér also retreated to Awaré on July 26, 1977, after inflicting heavy damage on the Somalis. Likewise, the Third Battalion at Gäladin made a tactical retreat and entered Awaré on July 29, destroying Somali contingents on its way. However, the Fortieth Battalion, which had been stationed at Awaré, could not make an orderly retreat and suffered heavy losses. Its remnants managed to make their way to Harär through Jijiga along with the Third and Twenty-Second Battalions. The proximity of Awaré to the border made reinforcement of the army units or the evacuation of civilians difficult. The Ethiopian jet fighters could not stay in the area for an extended time due to the danger of being shot down by Somali combat aircraft or antiaircraft weapons. Civilian airplanes could not make daytime flights to the area for similar reasons. On a mission that seemed impossible, two DC-119 airplanes landed at night to unload fuel and ammunition, and they managed to evacuate women and children on their return flight.³⁰

The situation for the other units was equally precarious. The Ninth Brigade retreated after inflicting heavy damage on the Somalis. The Second Tank Battalion, in particular, destroyed several Somali tanks before leaving its positions. Although the troops were told to swiftly move to Dägāhabur to reinforce the Eleventh Brigade there, they rejected the order, complaining that their families should first be evacuated. Then, instead of moving to Dägāhabur, they retreated to Harär through Sägäg, Fiq, and Babbillé. The Fifth Battalion at Mustahil also marched a long way along the border to Dolo, then to Filtu and Nägällé, before ending up in Addis Ababa.³¹ The retreating troops faced enormous challenges. They walked an average distance of four hundred kilometers along with children and elderly people through the arid lowlands of

the Ogadén. They trekked through routes and passes full of ambushers and land mines. It took them twenty-two days of arduous travel to reach Harär. But the Eleventh Brigade based at Dägähabur continued the resistance under the command of Colonel Eshätu Mäkonnen. Among the thirty-one Somali tanks rolling toward Dägähabur, the Eleventh Brigade destroyed twenty-six of them, and it held its position until July 31, 1977.³²

The attack on Diré Dawa

As the Ethiopian forces withdrew from several garrison towns, the Somalis were in control of a sizable portion of the Ogadén. Just four days after the beginning of the invasion, the Somalis made a deep thrust and tried to take Diré Dawa through a surprise attack. Diré Dawa had enormous strategic importance. In addition to being a major industrial town, it stands at a vital intersection between the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway and the Addis Ababa-Harär road. More importantly, the second largest airfield and several military depots were also in Diré Dawa. The capture of the town by the Somalis would, therefore, be a great strategic victory that could determine the course of the war in favor of Somalia. To that end, the Somalis deployed an infantry brigade, two artillery battalions, a tank battalion, a ballistic missile rocket battery, and three brigades of the WSLF guerrillas on the Diré Dawa front. The invaders launched the attack on the town on July 16, 1977, at 0400 hours.³³

Led by Lieutenant Colonel Täkaleñ Negussé, the defenders—the Seventy-Eighth Brigade, the Seventh Infantry Battalion, the 216th Nābälbal (Flame) Battalion, and the 752nd Militia Battalion—were enormously outnumbered and outgunned by the Somalis. The battle raged until 1100 hours, and the Somalis pushed the defenders back to the suburbs of the town. At that critical moment, reinforcements arrived from Harär. With close air support, the troops from Harär helped the defenders to turn the tide. Through a counteroffensive, they drove the Somalis back twenty kilometers and captured various weapons.³⁴

Once they were beaten off, the Somalis delayed the second assault on Diré Dawa until they controlled the garrison towns in the Ogadén, southern Sidamo, and Balé. Thus, between July 30 and August 8, 1977, the Somalis captured Dolo, El Karré, and Filtu. Within a matter of three to four weeks, the Somalis succeeded in penetrating seven hundred kilometers deep into southeastern Ethiopia and three hundred kilometers into southern Ethiopia. The Somalis completed the first stage of their offensive with tremendous success by the middle of August.³⁵

The second stage of the Somali offensive aimed at concentrating their forces around Jijiga, Harär, and Diré Dawa to take control of these major towns. The Somalis launched the second major assault on Diré Dawa on August 16, 1977. The Mogadishu government deployed to the Diré Dawa front two

motorized and two infantry brigades, a tank brigade with forty-nine tanks, an artillery brigade with sixty-two guns, and an air defense battery with eighteen antiaircraft weapons. All these units were put under the command of Brigadier General Mohamed Nur Galal. But the Somali advance was not without problems. While marching on Diré Dawa, the Somalis could be clearly seen from the air. Taking off from the Diré Dawa air base, the Ethiopian air force repeatedly bombed Somali columns.³⁶ Despite repeated air strikes, the Somalis continued their advance to Diré Dawa. But the mountains to the east of the town prevented them from deploying their tanks and armored vehicles. As a result, they were forced to make a detour to the west and move from Harāwa along the railway to the town. The Second Militia Brigade and a tank battalion had already reinforced the defenders of Diré Dawa. However, torrential rain made roads muddy, which immobilized tanks and armored vehicles.³⁷

The Somalis began assaulting Ethiopian positions at 0500 hours with tank and artillery shells. Not only did the Somali artillery barrage throw the population into panic, but also it destroyed the air traffic control tower at the airport and damaged cotton, meat, and cement factories. Nature seemed to be on the Somali side. Foggy weather prevented the Ethiopian air force from bombing Somali positions and halting the Somali advance.³⁸ The fog helped the Somalis to intensify their close-in offensive toward the town. As the Somalis tightened the noose around Diré Dawa, all the airplanes were transferred to the Dābrā Zāyet air base. As a result, Somali tanks rolled to the Diré Dawa airfield and blew up a fuel depot nearby. Of the two tanks Ethiopians possessed at the time, one was disabled by mud. At that critical moment, reinforcements arrived from Harār with two tanks and BRDM armored vehicles. The battle raged around the outskirts of the town for several hours. The Somalis were close to capturing the town. While fierce fighting was going on, the townspeople, especially workers at the cotton factory, provided vital support to the army. Cart drivers, in particular, played a crucial role in evacuating the wounded and moving supplies to the defenders. In the meantime, the weather showed some improvement. Fighter jets from Dābrā Zāyet relentlessly struck Somali positions and destroyed more than a dozen Somali tanks. The air attack tipped the balance in Ethiopia's favor. At 1500 hours, the Ethiopian army mounted a counteroffensive. The Somalis were thrown back by twenty-two kilometers along the railway and pushed back in the direction of Jaldessa by eighteen kilometers. The army soon built defense lines at Elbah and Hāmārka, northeast of Diré Dawa. During the retreat, the Somalis left behind all sorts of light and heavy weapons, including tanks and artillery. The failure of the Somalis to effectively use their artillery to maximum effect, their inability to use positions that gave them strategic advantage, the staunchness of the defenders, the patriotic resistance of the people of Diré Dawa, and the close air support by the air force contributed to the defeat of the invaders.³⁹ Given the huge strategic importance of Diré

Dawa, the successful defense of the town was what Gebru called “a sweet victory for the Ethiopians.”⁴⁰

As the war entered a critical stage, the Därg took a series of measures. One of these was the establishment of the National Revolutionary Operations Command (NROC) under the leadership of Mängestu H. Maryam in July 1977. The NROC set up two regional commands—the Northern Command in Asmāra and the Eastern Command in Harär under the leadership of Colonel (later Major General) Haylu G. Mikaél and Colonel (later Brigadier General) Eshätu Mäkonnen, respectively.⁴¹ Secondly, the Ethiopian government urged the Organization of African Unity (OAU), a forerunner of the African Union, to officially denounce Somalia’s flagrant and unprovoked aggression against Ethiopia. The OAU dutifully authorized its mediation committee to pass a resolution on the Somali-Ethiopian war. Accordingly, in its meeting held in Libreville, Gabon, between August 5 and 9, 1977, the mediation committee composed of eight member states “reaffirmed the inviolability of African frontiers,” thus supporting Ethiopia’s stand. The OAU’s position had its own impact on Somalia’s foreign relations, isolating Somalia internationally.⁴²

Thirdly, on August 20, 1977, Mängestu made a national call urging the Ethiopian people to take up arms against the Somali invaders.⁴³ That call to arms was followed three weeks later by a summons to all veterans under the age of sixty to enlist in the army. At the same time, the people of Diré Dawa, Harär, and Jijiga were urged to rise up in arms against the invaders. All medical personnel were asked to volunteer to treat the wounded on the war front, and government and private organizations were told to put all their public and freight transport vehicles at the NROC’s disposal.⁴⁴

The fall of Jijiga

As the government was trying to rally the masses to the defense of the country, the Somalis again concentrated their forces on the Jijiga front in August 1977. They soon formed a task force under the command of Brigadier General Ahmed Salhan with the purpose of capturing Jijiga and the strategic Karra Mara Mountains. The task force included five motorized brigades, two tank brigades (with 124 tanks), three infantry brigades, a commando brigade, and six artillery battalions (with 72 guns).⁴⁵

Confronting this huge force were Ethiopia’s Tenth Mechanized Brigade and two tank battalions with forty-two tanks under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Haylé Täsa Mikaél. Though greatly outnumbered and outgunned by the Somalis, the mechanized units around Jijiga managed to defend their positions with the support of the air force until mid-August 1977. Then, the Ninety-Second Militia Brigade arrived to strengthen the defenses around Jijiga. Failure to overrun Ethiopian defenses forced the Somali commanders to change their tactics. Instead of committing all their forces to fron-

tal assaults, they deployed the Third Motorized Brigade and thousands of the WSLF guerrillas behind Ethiopian lines to cut off the Harär-Jijiga supply route. That maneuver forced the Tenth Mechanized Brigade to send back some of its units along the Jijiga-Harär road. Ethiopia's mechanized units were now overstretched and could not withstand the persistent onslaught. On August 30, 1977, by employing intensive artillery barrage, fierce tank assault, and heavy aerial bombardment, the Somalis captured Jijiga and forced the Ethiopian army to retreat to Adäw, a small town at the western foot of Mount Karra Mara.⁴⁶ Despite the army's failure to hold its position, the air force destroyed more than twenty Somali tanks and artillery pieces.⁴⁷

Following a brief rehabilitation, Ethiopian forces counterattacked the Somalis and regained Jijiga the next day. The Somalis left behind several tanks and other heavy weapons. As the army entered Jijiga, Mängestu arrived in Harär to boost the morale of the fighting men and give orders on the spot. On September 1, 1977, after an intelligence officer briefed him about the situation, Mängestu proceeded to Jijiga at the head of the Eighteenth Infantry Battalion and the Third Division advance headquarters. The Third Motorized Battalion also moved to Jijiga as a rear guard. On his way, Mängestu met a Somali force that had slipped behind Ethiopian lines to cut off the Jijiga-Harär road. The small army under his command fought its way from Fäfam to Adäw. Mängestu triumphantly entered Jijiga followed by the Third Motorized Battalion. While Mängestu was in Jijiga, all Somali artillery fell silent and the day was peaceful. That pause in hostilities enabled Mängestu to inspect Ethiopian defense lines by helicopter. Before leaving by helicopter, Mängestu ordered the army to heroically defend the town.⁴⁸

But Mängestu's orders went unheeded as the Somalis launched a fresh and a more determined offensive on September 9. They continuously hailed ballistic missile rockets and artillery shells on Ethiopian positions. At that critical moment, members of the army who may have been affiliated with opposition political organizations began to agitate troops to abandon their positions and turn against the military government. The agitation brought about anarchy and retreat. Some units are said to have killed their commanders. To make matters worse, the radar that had been installed on the summit of Mount Karra Mara was destroyed by Somali fire. That undermined the capability of the Ethiopian air force to track down Somali combat aircraft. The destruction of the radar station triggered a mass retreat to Adäw. At that point, the army could not get the much-needed close air support because the jet fighters were performing aerobatics in Addis Ababa to mark the third anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution. When the Somalis began to target Adäw with artillery shells, the army continued its full retreat to Qoré.⁴⁹

On September 12, 1977, the Somalis captured Jijiga. The third anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution was celebrated on the same day with bitterness and humiliation. But why did the army lose the battle at Jijiga? Political par-

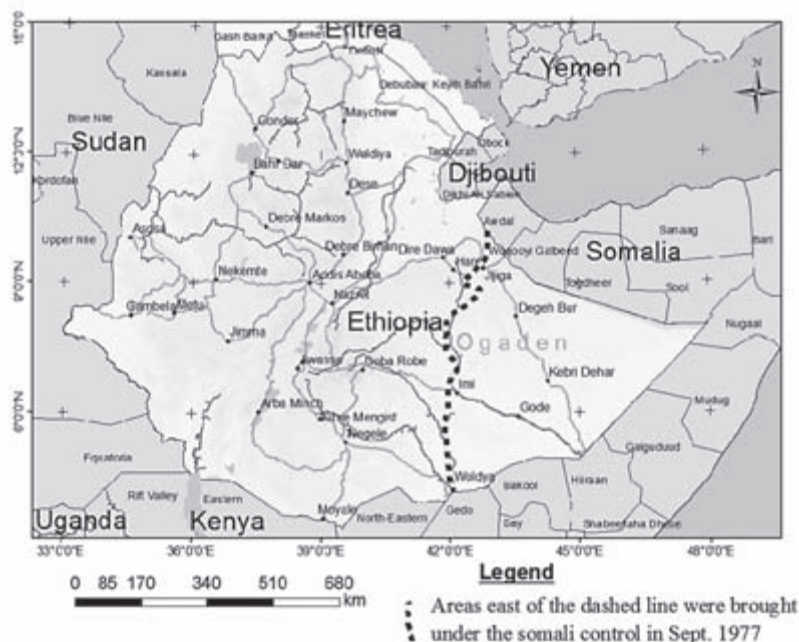
ties that were opposed to the Därg, mainly the EPRP, did have members and sympathizers in the army. The agitation of such soldiers had of course contributed to the Ethiopian defeat. But it was not the sole reason for the loss. Equally important is the fact that there was an enormous disparity in firepower. The Ethiopian troops could not endure the Somali rocket and artillery barrage. In addition, there was no cohesion among the various units of the Ethiopian army. The militia units were at odds with the regular soldiers. The latter, Gebru says, “received larger and better rations and their monthly paycheck was four times fatter than that of the militia.” That imbalance resulted in mutiny and reluctance to fight off the Somalis. A combination of all these factors led to the Ethiopian defeat at Jijiga.⁵⁰

Worse still, on September 13, Mount Karra Mara, which had huge strategic importance, fell into Somali hands. Colonel (later Lieutenant General) Täsfaýé G. Kidan was assigned to coordinate the fighting around Jijiga. In a letter to Māngestu, he claimed that he was left behind at Karra Mara by the retreating troops. But the truth is quite different. He was not at Karra Mara during those perilous moments. He was the one who ordered the army to retreat. Māngestu’s orders that Mount Karra Mara should be defended at all costs were simply ignored not only by the retreating soldiers but also by his own commanders.⁵¹ The panic-stricken troops finally halted at Qoré, midway between Jijiga and Harär. As the Somali artillery shells fell in their midst, the soldiers at Qoré were once again in a state of panic. The Third Division, which had already set up its advance headquarters at Qoré, began to take harsh measures against retreating soldiers. In addition, on September 13, the troops at Qoré held a meeting and vowed not only to defend their positions but also to shoot retreating soldiers on the spot. In the meantime, air force pilots were given a free hand to strike friendly forces if they fled. The officers blamed for the retreat from Jijiga were executed.⁵²

The tide of war turns

The execution of dissidents halted the retreat and stabilized the Qoré defenses, which were set up on a relatively high ground to enable the army to halt Somali advances. By mid-September, the NROC designed a plan known as Operation Awrora to defend Harär and Diré Dawa, to safeguard the Addis Ababa-Harär road, and to reopen the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway. While Operation Awrora was being designed, the Somalis were preparing trenches and placing land mines at strategic passes between Qoré and Mount Karra Mara to make Ethiopian counteroffensives difficult. However, by suspending their offensive for a week, the Somalis not only lost momentum but also allowed Ethiopians to strengthen their defenses and bring in fresh troops to Qoré.⁵³ Qoré was now defended by the Second, Fourth, Tenth, and Twelfth Artillery Battalions; the Third Tank Battalion; the Fourth Air Defense Battery;

Map 3. Somali-controlled areas in September 1977.



the Third, Fifth, Eighteenth, and Thirty-Third Infantry Battalions; the 021 Veterans Battalion; a company of engineers; and the Third Auxiliary Unit.⁵⁴ When a Somali mechanized brigade made a frontal assault on September 20 to overrun the Qoré defenses, it was quickly beaten off. The commander of the Somali mechanized brigade later admitted that his unit had “suffered 60 percent casualties.”⁵⁵ On September 26, 1977, a Somali task force bypassed Qoré from the south and attempted to outmaneuver Ethiopian units in the rear. Nevertheless, led by its new commander, Colonel Yelma Gezaw, the Third Division repulsed the Somalis.⁵⁶

While the army was fighting hard to stop the Somali advances, the Därg kept on pressing the Soviets to deliver arms to Ethiopia. The Soviets responded in the affirmative: they supplied Ethiopia with T-55 tanks, multiple ballistic missile rocket launchers, and MiG-21 fighter planes in late September 1977.⁵⁷ Two weeks later, the Därg received other good news: the termination of Soviet arms delivery to Somalia. The Soviets were thus committed to helping Ethiopia.⁵⁸

The Ethiopian army that had long been acquainted with American weapons had to familiarize itself with the new Soviet military technology. That adjustment was achieved fairly quickly. Not only did the militia units get acquainted with Soviet weapons but also they gained considerable “combat

experience.” In tandem with that, as a gesture of socialist solidarity, South Yemen sent in late September two armored battalions to Ethiopia. By October 1977, with the assistance of the South Yemeni troops, the first tank unit armed with Soviet-made T-34 main battle tanks was ready for combat.⁵⁹

While all such developments boosted the morale of Ethiopian troops, the Somalis began to run into difficulties. Until the fall of Jijiga into Somali hands, the Ethiopian Somalis living in the Ogadén had unreservedly supported the Somali army. As the Somali forces tried to move beyond Jijiga, however, the support vanished into thin air and they found themselves in hostile territory. Unlike the inhabitants of the lowlands, the highlanders regarded the Somalis as invaders, and they began to harass them in every way possible. Besides, the landscape beyond Jijiga proved unsuitable and difficult for Somali mechanized operation. Moreover, as the Somalis penetrated deep into the interior, their supply lines were overstretched across seven hundred kilometers in the southeast and three hundred kilometers in the south. The Ethiopian air force, which reigned supreme in the skies, targeted these overextended supply lines. As a result, Somalia’s two-month-long lightning offensive gave way to stalemated fighting from mid-September onward.⁶⁰

Not to let the strategic initiative slip out of their hands, the Somalis resumed their offensive, this time to take Harär. They employed two tactics. First, they tried to overrun the Qoré defenses through intensive artillery barrage and frontal tank assault. To withstand Somali artillery shells, the Qoré troops strengthened their defenses with strong bunkers. Meanwhile, the government threw every available force to Qoré. Accordingly, the 219th Nābälbal Battalion, the Seventy-Fourth Militia Brigade, the Second Tank Battalion, and an artillery battalion with 122mm guns reinforced the Qoré troops. Secondly, the Somalis attempted to outflank Ethiopian defenders in the south and north. The maneuver in the south was just a feint attack intended to force Ethiopians to disperse the troop concentration at Qoré. Though the Somalis in the south were quickly beaten off, the engagement in the north was fierce. Probably the bloodiest battle of the war was fought between October 8 and November 5, 1977, to control Dalächa, a strategic hill north of Qoré. The battle seesawed as Dalächa repeatedly fell into Somali hands and then was regained by Ethiopians. For instance, on October 13, the Somalis took control of Dalächa but lost it to the Ethiopians the next day. Again on October 18, the Somalis, supported by tanks and artillery, attempted to take Dalächa hill. But they lost more than a battalion of men and two MiG-17 jet fighters. During the battle for Dalächa hill, the Somalis fired an average of eighty artillery shells every ten minutes on Ethiopian positions, causing considerable human and material damage.⁶¹

As their attempts to overrun and outflank the Qoré defenses were frustrated by stiff resistance from Ethiopians, the Somalis concentrated their forces on the Fädis, Babbillé, and Jarso-Kombolcha fronts to launch a three-pronged of-

fensive to take Harär. On November 10, 1977, the Somalis tried to overwhelm Ethiopians with massive firepower to capture Jarso, a small town thirty-five kilometers north of Harär. Then, on November 12, the Somalis mounted a simultaneous attack on the Fädīs and Babbillé fronts so as to advance to Harär from the south and southeast.⁶²

On the next day, an event of considerable strategic importance occurred. Infuriated by Moscow's commitment to help Ethiopia, the Mogadishu government expelled all Soviet and Cuban military advisers from Somalia. In addition, Somalia unilaterally abrogated the 1974 Somali-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, denied the Soviets use of Somali military bases, and severed its diplomatic relations with Cuba.⁶³

The Somali president, Mohamed Siad Barre, hoped to replace Soviet support with American aid, as Ethiopia had done the reverse. In fact, as early as July 1977, the Carter administration did promise to supply Somalia with defensive weapons. But considering Somalia's unprovoked aggression against Ethiopia, the U.S. government made it clear that no American weapons would be supplied to Somalia as long as its forces were violating Ethiopia's territorial integrity.⁶⁴

The Soviets to the rescue

The expulsion of Soviet and Cuban advisers from Somalia was immediately followed by a massive airlift of Soviet weapons to Ethiopia. The shipment of arms was accompanied by the arrival of about 1,500 Soviet military advisers and more than 12,000 Cuban combatants. While General Vasily Ivanovich Petrov, deputy commander of the Soviet ground forces, headed the Soviet military mission, General Arnaldo Ochoa Sánchez led the Cuban troops to Ethiopia.⁶⁵ The Cuban soldiers are said to have arrived with their own military hardware that included the latest T-62 tanks. Likewise, the Soviets brought with them indispensable information about Somalia. While the Soviets, Cubans, and South Yemenis (code-named by the Ethiopians "Comrades 01, 02, and 03," respectively) stood on Ethiopia's side, the Somalis had to fight, in the words of Gebru, "almost alone against an international colossus."⁶⁶

Having received enormous quantities of Soviet weaponry, Ethiopia came to have, for the first time in the war, superior firepower. In the meantime, the Eastern Command concentrated additional troops on the three fronts where the Somalis had been assaulting Ethiopian positions to capture Harär. On November 23, the Somalis almost managed to overwhelm the defenders on the Fädīs front and reached the suburbs of Harär, only three kilometers from the city center.⁶⁷ The Somalis claimed that one of their units had even reached the walls of the Harär Military Academy in a deep thrust into the southern part of the town.⁶⁸ The timely arrival of the Second Paracommando Brigade enabled the defenders to beat off the Somalis through a counteroffensive. In

addition to the Second Paracommando Brigade, the 501 People's Revolutionary Guards (PRGs) Brigade, the Sixty-First and Sixty-Second Paracommando Battalions, a rapid deployment (*Fätno Dārash*) company, a platoon of M-41 tanks, a reconnoitering company, and two artillery batteries were deployed on the Fädis front.⁶⁹

The situation on the Jarso-Kombolcha and Babbillé fronts was also critical. On the Jarso-Kombolcha front, the Somalis had been trying to overrun Ethiopian defenses starting from November 10, 1977. On November 17, the Somalis intensified their artillery barrage. As a result of the renewed Somali offensive, troops of the Seventy-Sixth and Ninety-Sixth Militia Brigades were gripped with panic and retreated to Kombolcha and Harär. Only a handful of soldiers remained behind and destroyed the army's property so as to prevent it from falling into Somali hands. Following a brief rehabilitation, the troops set up defenses at Hablo, a strategic hill on the western outskirts of Jarso. The Somalis managed not only to intercept the contingent heading to Jarso at Fälaṇa but also to overrun the defenses at Hablo, forcing the remnants to flee to Kombolcha. The Somalis inflicted heavy damage on the defenders at Jarso and Fälaṇa. Fallen into Somali hands were two 105mm artillery and several vehicles, along with their loads of supplies. In hot pursuit of Ethiopians retreating to Alāmaya, Amaréṣa, and Harär, the Somalis captured part of Kombolcha on November 25. Shortly afterward, however, the unit that had been defending Kombolcha against heavy odds was reinforced by the First Paracommando Brigade and regained Kombolcha, pushing the Somalis back to Fälaṇa.⁷⁰

On the Babbillé front, too, the Somalis made repeated onslaughts to overrun Ethiopian defenses so as to capture Babbillé and cut off the Harär-Qoré route. Positioned on the Babbillé front was the Second Task Force, which included the Sixty-Eighth, Ninety-First, and Ninety-Fourth Militia Brigades; an antitank unit with 106mm guns; a platoon of M-47 tanks; the Fourth Tank Battalion; the 013 Veterans Battalion; a mechanized platoon; a platoon of 4.2 mortars; the 101 Workers' Brigade; a ballistic missile battery; and a battery of 105mm artillery. Despite the concentration of several army units, the Somalis pushed back the task force on November 12 after capturing several strategic points. EPRP members were allegedly blamed for the retreat. They were even accused of killing junior commanders and were summarily executed. On November 13, the task force mounted a counteroffensive between 0700 and 1330 hours and captured Abu Shārif, between Babbillé and Fiq. The Somalis are said to have sustained heavy losses. But that did not deter them from attempting another offensive.⁷¹

On November 25, the Somalis counterattacked Ethiopian positions from three directions. But they were quickly beaten back. Two days later, a greater Somali force temporarily succeeded in dislodging Ethiopians from Abu Shārif. But shortly afterward, the Ethiopian army regained Abu Shārif with the support of the air force.⁷²

Ethiopia drives the Somalis back

To decisively crush the Somalis within the shortest possible time and to make the war less costly, Ethiopia made a number of preparations. To begin with, the air force was given several missions: to make itself ready for nocturnal operations; to make relentless reconnaissance flights to identify Somali concentration points; to carry out bombing raids on key strategic targets deep inside Somalia, such as depots, ports, airfields, bridges, and convoys; and to drop leaflets throughout Somali-occupied Ethiopian territory to agitate inhabitants to take up arms against the invaders. The government declared amnesty to all people who had been supporting the invaders. Secondly, the army had to strengthen its defenses with trenches and bunkers so as to halt Somali advances. Meanwhile, the Ethiopians intended to force the Somalis to use their last strategic reserve and to wear down the Somalis' capability to launch an offensive. Thirdly, the army planned to acquaint itself with the new Soviet weaponry. In this regard, the first Cuban contingent of 3,000 troops, which had arrived in December 1977, did a commendable job of training Ethiopians in the use of Soviet T-54 and T-55 main battle tanks as well as heavy artillery. In addition, the main strike force made a joint military exercise in offensive tactics with Cuban tank and artillery units. Fourthly, the regular and militia units deployed on several fronts were organized into seven divisions. These were the Third, Fourth, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Infantry Divisions. In the meantime, all sorts of vehicles were made available to move rations, arms, ammunition, fuel, and lubricating oil to the war front. Finally, "fifth columnists"—Ethiopians who secretly aided the enemy, who had been blamed for the army's retreat on several occasions—were executed.⁷³

On the eve of the Ethiopian counteroffensive, the government amassed 64,500 combatants organized into thirty-three infantry brigades and two motorized brigades armed with 300 tanks and 156 artillery. On the other hand, the Somalis had 126,000 troops organized into twenty-two infantry brigades, four motorized brigades, and a mechanized brigade with 135 tanks, 205 artillery, and 100 armored vehicles.⁷⁴

The Supreme Military Strategic Committee (SMSC) headquartered in Harär had already designed the plan of operation for the counteroffensive. The SMSC was made up of Ethiopian senior officers (drawn from the NROC and the Eastern Command) and Soviet and Cuban military advisers. The Ethiopian high command included Brigadier General Tayyé Telahun, minister of defense; Colonel (later Major General) Fanta Bälay, commander of the air force; Colonel (later Major General) Mulatu Nägash, commander of the Eastern Command; Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Mäsfen Gäbrä Qal, operations officer of the Eastern Command; and Major (later Brigadier General) Taddäsä T. Haymanot, intelligence officer of the Eastern Command. The Soviet group included General Vasily Petrov, head of the

military mission, and General Gregory Barisov, former chief adviser to the Somali armed forces.⁷⁵

The SMSC planned the counteroffensive to be executed in five stages. In the first and second stages, Ethiopian forces would dislodge the Somalis from the Fädis and Diré Dawa fronts, respectively. After regaining all the areas north of Harär in the third stage, the army units from Diré Dawa and Kombolcha would meet at Chenhaksän and resume their counteroffensive toward Jijiga. In the fourth stage, the army units advancing to Jijiga from the north and those from Qoré would converge on Mount Karra Mara and retake Jijiga. In the last stage, the army would eject the Somalis from the whole of the Ogadén, Balé, and Sidamo.⁷⁶

By January 1978, the Ethiopian forces, now named the First Revolutionary Liberation Army (FRLA), were well positioned to launch a large-scale counteroffensive. While the army was making its last-minute preparations for a counteroffensive, the Somalis mounted a preemptive strike on Ethiopian positions on January 22, 1978, and tried to advance to Harär from Babbillé (east), Awoday (west), Fädis (south), and Kombolcha (north). In the west, they attempted to cut off the Diré Dawa-Harär road by surging toward Awoday (a small town between Harär and Alämaya) and Amarésa some five kilometers west of Harär.⁷⁷ On the same day, the Somalis pounded Babbillé with artillery shells and ballistic missile rockets. Then, their infantry and tank units made a coordinated assault on Ethiopian positions to take Babbillé. The Somalis did manage to dislodge Ethiopian infantry units from both sides of Abu Shärf. But a tank unit and a group of veterans held their positions until reinforcements arrived. Between January 22 and 24, the Somalis lost hundreds of their troops, eight tanks, a BM-13 rocket launcher, and several artillery pieces. On the Awoday-Amarésa front, too, the Somalis suffered heavy losses. Once more, the Second Paracommando Brigade saved Harär by beating off the Somalis around Amarésa and Awoday. On the same front, Ethiopian jet fighters destroyed Somali tanks, APCs, and artillery in eighty-six sorties.⁷⁸

Once the threat on the Awoday-Amarésa line was averted, the Ethiopian army swiftly moved to the Fädis front and counterattacked the Somalis on January 25. On the next day, following an intensive artillery barrage that lasted twenty minutes, Ethiopian infantrymen, closely supported by the air force, routed two Somali tank battalions on the Fädis front and captured large amounts of heavy weapons and ammunition.⁷⁹

Soon after retaking Fädis, the army moved on to the second stage of the counteroffensive on the Diré Dawa front. Reconnaissance flights over the area confirmed that the Somalis had concentrated the bulk of their forces at Haräwa and Jaldéssa, northeast of Diré Dawa. Entrenched along the Haräwa-Jaldéssa line were nine Somali infantry brigades, a tank brigade with fifty-seven tanks, an artillery battalion with sixty guns, and a mechanized battalion with thirty APCs. Poised against the Somalis on the Diré Dawa front were

the Seventy-Eighth Brigade, the Seventh Battalion, a tank company from the Ninth Battalion, a battery of BM-21 rockets, a battery of 105mm artillery, a platoon of 106mm antitank guns, the Fourth Mechanized Company, and the Sixty-First Paracommando Battalion. On the Jaldéssa front, the Sixty-Ninth and the Seventy-Fifth Brigades, an antitank platoon, the Eightieth Tank Battalion, a tank company from the Ninth Battalion, an infantry battalion from the Ninety-Third Brigade, the 201st Nābālbāl Battalion, the 791st Infantry Battalion, and the Sixteenth Infantry Battalion were deployed.⁸⁰

On January 31, 1978, the Ninth Division deployed a tank battalion along the Diré Dawa-Harār road and an artillery battalion to Hawalé (south of Diré Dawa) for deception purposes. The movement of troops and weapons in broad daylight to the south and east of Diré Dawa deceived the Somalis, who came to believe that the next Ethiopian counteroffensive would be in those directions. The Somalis around Harāwa were taken by complete surprise when the Ethiopian and Cuban units launched a counteroffensive on Somali positions on February 1 at 0700 hours. On the way to Harāwa, a BTR APC and two tanks belonging to Cuban units were destroyed by friendly land mines that floodwaters had washed away from their original positions. Despite such setbacks, the joint Ethiopian-Cuban troops swiftly surged toward Harāwa. The panic-stricken Somalis had no time even to eat the food they had cooked. They left behind a number of tanks, APCs, artillery pieces, machine guns, and food supplies. Ethiopian jet fighters and bombers destroyed most of the Somali APCs that had been retreating, and the remaining few fell off cliffs and into ditches. Leaving the 782nd Battalion to look after captured property, the other units, spearheaded by Cuban troops, outflanked the Somalis at Jaldéssa.⁸¹ The attack on Jaldéssa began on February 4, 1978. When the Cuban forces were making a wide enveloping move to attack them from behind, the Somalis at first thought that a friendly force was on its way to reinforce them. Having discovered the danger of being cut off and annihilated, the Somalis retreated in disarray toward Anāno Mité, leaving their arms and supplies behind. The Ninth Tank Battalion, the 201st Nābālbāl Battalion, the Seventy-Fifth Militia Brigade, the Sixty-Ninth Militia Brigade (revered for its bravery), and a militia company of the Seventy-Ninth Brigade followed on the heels of the retreating Somalis. As they converged on Lāwonaji, north of Adāw, the 108th Militia Brigade as well as a Cuban artillery battalion, a tank brigade, and a ballistic missile rocket battalion joined them. Meanwhile, the Somalis were reinforced by a tank battalion, a motorized brigade, and an artillery battalion that enabled them to briefly capture Arabi, north of Jijiga. But Ethiopian and Cuban forces soon overwhelmed them. During that engagement, five Ethiopian-Cuban tanks destroyed fourteen Somali tanks. An Ethiopian tank that ran out of ammunition disabled a Somali tank by colliding with it. The Ethiopian-Cuban forces then moved eastward and positioned themselves north of Jijiga for the next counteroffensive.⁸²

While units of the Ninth Division and their Cuban comrades in arms advanced toward Jijiga from the north in a wide enveloping maneuver, the Tenth Division on the Kombolcha front repulsed the Somalis who had attempted to overrun Ethiopian defenses so as to advance to Harär. Placed under the Tenth Division were the Seventy-Fourth and the 102nd Militia Brigades, the First Paracommando Brigade, the First Cuban Tank Company, the Second Cuban Artillery Battalion, a ballistic missile battery, and an antitank platoon. Having foiled the Somali attempt to cut off the Dängägo-Diré Dawa road, the Tenth Division began its counteroffensive on February 8, 1978. On the same day at 1800 hours, two battalions of the First Paracommando Brigade and the 102nd Militia Brigade regained Jarso. On February 9, the Seventy-Fourth Militia Brigade took control of the Kombolcha-Jarso road and captured many weapons.⁸³

Meanwhile, the Seventy-Fifth Militia Brigade, now put under the Tenth Division, was ordered to advance from Anäno Mité to Woday Fälane. The Somalis, who had already positioned themselves on strategic heights, forced the Militia Brigade to retreat. At that point, the commander of the Eastern Command moved to the war front and made some adjustments. While the Seventy-Fifth Militia and the First Paracommando Brigade were ordered to resume the counteroffensive, the Seventy-Fourth Militia Brigade and two battalions of the 102nd Militia Brigade remained as reservists. The renewed counteroffensive forced the Somalis to retreat to Geri Qochär, where they set up defensive lines. But on February 28, the Ethiopian army drove the Somalis from Geri Qochär and captured a great deal of small arms and food supplies.⁸⁴

In the next four days, however, the army could not advance owing to heavy rains and foggy weather. It was only on March 3, 1978, that the army was supplied with food by helicopter. On the next day, at 0900 hours, the troops, setting out from Geri Qochär, regained Chenhaksän and moved forward to join the army coming from Arabi. On their way, they lost two tanks to land mines. After clearing off eight hundred land mines, the troops moved forward parallel to the Harär-Jijiga road.⁸⁵

On its part, the Eighth Division on the Babbillé front was ready to strike Somali positions. Placed under its command were the Sixty-Eighth, the Ninety-First, and Ninety-Fourth Militia Brigades; the 101st Airborne Brigade; the Fourth Tank Battalion; an artillery battery; a battery of BM-21 rockets; the Third Paracommando Brigade; a Cuban ballistic missile battery; and a tank battalion as well as two artillery battalions (one Cuban and one Ethiopian). Units of the Eighth Division were assigned to open up the Babbillé-Fiḡ road and then move on to other towns in the Ogaḡén. On March 4, at 1500 hours, they captured a strategic point along the Babbillé-Fiḡ road named Sheikh Ahmad-Sheikh Indris. But Somali artillery barrage made farther advance difficult. The army even retreated from the places it had captured. After reinforcements, the army regained Sheikh Ahmad-Sheikh Indris. On March 8, at 1130

hours, Ethiopian units regained the town of Fiq. Two days later, they entered another small town in the heart of the Ogadén named Sägä.⁸⁶

Conditions on the Qoré front also favored Ethiopian forces. Deployed on the Qoré front was the Third Division—consisting of the Tenth Mechanized Brigade; the Ninth Infantry Brigade; the Third, Fifth and Eighteenth Infantry Battalions; the 219th Nābälbal Battalion; the Seventy-Fourth and Ninetieth Militia Brigades; the Fourth Artillery Battalion; a BM-21 battalion; an artillery Battalion with 122mm guns; a battery of 105mm guns; the Second Tank Battalion; and an antitank battery. Likewise, positioned along the Gursum line were the Ninety-Second Militia Brigade, the 023 Veterans Battalion, a battery of 105mm guns, a tank platoon, and a squad of combat engineers.⁸⁷

The earlier operations carried out by the Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Divisions and their outflanking maneuvers toward Jijiga from the north made the Third Division's frontal advance less difficult. One of the main objectives of the counteroffensive was to retake Jijiga with minimal sacrifice. According to the SMSC's operational study, mounting a frontal assault on the highly fortified Somali positions along the Qoré-Jijiga line, for which the Somalis were well prepared, would be suicidal. Instead, an outflanking assault from the north could be less costly and likely to bring quick victory. Accordingly, the First Paracommando Brigade, the Sixty-Ninth and Seventy-Fifth Militia Brigades, and two battalions of the Seventy-Fourth Militia Brigade, in collaboration with a Cuban armored brigade consisting of sixty to seventy tanks, outflanked the Somalis entrenched on Mount Karra Mara and attacked them from the north, something the Somalis had not expected. What was more surprising and frustrating for the Somalis was the airlifting of Cuban troops and tanks by huge helicopters behind enemy lines so as to cut off Somali supply lines and escape routes and then attack them from the rear.⁸⁸

Of the militia units that attacked the Somalis from the north, it was the Sixty-Ninth Brigade that received Ethiopian as well as Cuban commendation. The Cubans, for instance, praised the Militia Brigade thus:

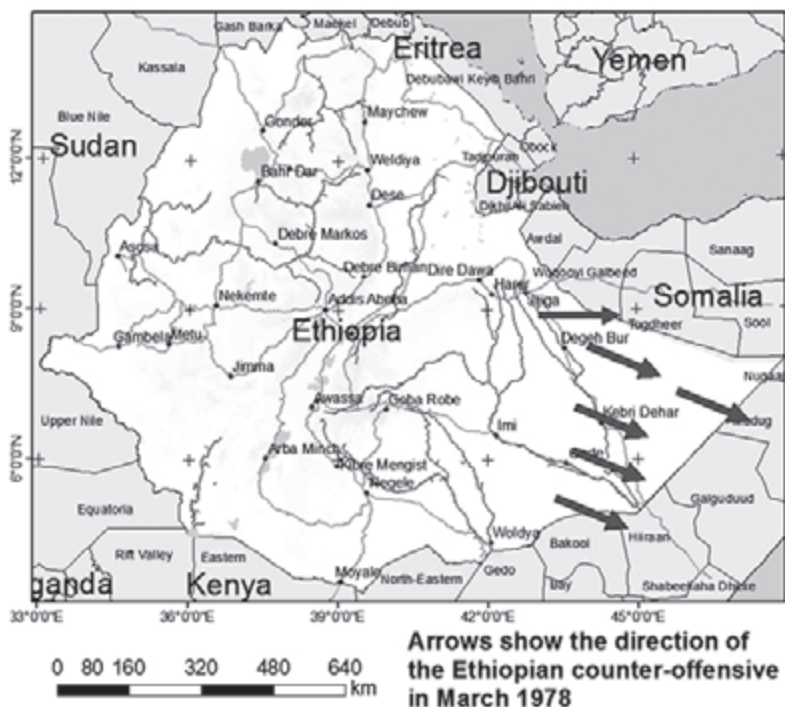
Marching on foot it virtually filtered into the mountain range . . . advancing over muddy terrain under torrential downpours, along difficult, narrow and dangerous mountain trails armed with tanks, artillery, and armored infantry (vehicles), it came with its forward units to the other side of the mountain range on February 28th . . .⁸⁹

Victory over Somalia

Despite heavy artillery barrage, intensive aerial bombardment, and coordinated tank and artillery assaults from Ethiopian-Cuban forces, the Somalis continued their stubborn resistance for three days. On the third day, however, all Somali resistance collapsed. On March 5, 1978, at 0900 hours, Ethiopian

and Cuban troops triumphantly entered Jijiga. As the Somalis poured onto the Jijiga-Togochalé and Jijiga-Dägähabur roads in full retreat, they were subjected to relentless aerial bombardment by Ethiopian jet fighters.⁹⁰

Map 4. The Ethiopian counteroffensive in March 1978.



When the Third Division marched from Qoré to Jijiga, it met no resistance from the Somalis. To avoid giving the Somalis a breathing space to regroup, a motorized battalion from the Third Division, the Third Cuban Tank Brigade, and the surviving members of the Sixty-Ninth Militia Brigade (which had lost 83 percent of its manpower before entering Jijiga) marched to Dägähabur on the same day Jijiga was retaken. The Ethiopian-Cuban troops regained Dägähabur on March 8, 1978. Due to the shortage of vehicles, infantrymen had to walk long distances to other towns in the Ogadén without enough water, and some died of thirst. Even then, the Third Battalion of the Third Division entered Awaré on March 12 at 1145 hours, while the Eighteenth Battalion of the same division regained Wardér on the next day at 0850 hours. Similarly, on March 17, at 0850 hours, the 923rd Battalion of the Third Division entered Godé. A day earlier, a platoon from the Tenth Division had been flown to Godé by helicopter. On March 14, the Third

Commando Brigade had already regained Qābri Dāhar. Two months later, the Sixty-Eighth Brigade reached Qālafo.⁹¹

The Third, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Divisions set up their headquarters at Dägāhabur, Qābri Dāhar, Diré Dawa, Jijiga, and Chenhaksān, respectively. However, due to the worsening military situation in the northern theater, the whole of the Third Division, most of the Tenth Division, and a brigade from the Eleventh Division were sent to Eritrea in early April 1978. As a result, the Eleventh Division was transferred to Dägāhabur. Although the Somalis were on the run, the army did not yet regain remote outposts, such as Mustahil, Gāladin, Shelabo, and Férfer. That enabled the Somalis to resume their guerrilla operations in the next two years until a final blow was delivered by Operation Lash in 1980.⁹² While the Eastern Command controlled most of the Ogadén, the Fourth and the Twelfth Divisions on the southern front regained Filtu, Dolo, Imi, and El Karré between March 8 and 17, 1978.⁹³

Costs of the war

Eventually, all guns fell silent, at least for some time, after raging for eight months. Obviously, the war brought enormous human and material damage to both countries. On the Ethiopian side, a total of 17,085 troops were put out of action, of whom 5,059 were killed, 8,207 were wounded, 2,423 went missing in action, and 1,236 deserted the army. The casualty figure included the 160 soldiers (some of them officers) who were executed for retreat and various acts of sabotage.⁹⁴ In addition, 163 Cuban soldiers lost their lives.⁹⁵ Official records pertaining to South Yemeni casualties are not so far available. With regard to Ethiopian prisoners of war (POWs) who fell into Somali hands, no official figures were given until 1988. But on the eve of an exchange of POWs between Ethiopia and Somalia ten years after the war, the MOND disclosed that a total of 2,523 Ethiopian POWs (including 206 civilians) were in Somalia. The government also revealed that there were 233 Somali POWs kept in Harār.⁹⁶ On its part, the International Committee of the Red Cross reported that it had visited 226 Ethiopian POWs in Somalia and 200 Somali POWs in Ethiopia in late 1987.⁹⁷

The material damage was also staggering. The total value of tanks, APCs, military and civilian vehicles, food and medical supplies, engineering and communications equipment, ammunition, explosives, and fuel destroyed during the war on the Ethiopian side was estimated at 284,509,223 birr (U.S. \$137,444,069 according to the exchange rate of the time). This total included, among other weapons, 133 American- and Soviet-made tanks and 107 APCs.⁹⁸

Somalia also suffered heavy human losses and immense material damage. According to Ethiopian official records, 5,676 Somali troops were killed and 1,983 wounded. Table 5.1 shows the number of Somali weapons captured or destroyed.

Table 5.1. Somalia's losses of weapons

Type of weapons	Captured	Destroyed	Total
Tanks	72	82	154
Armored personnel carriers (APCs)	32	238	270
Antiaircraft guns	72	49	121
Artillery pieces	188	107	295
Military and civilian vehicles	63	561	624
Combat aircraft	-	34	34
Various types of rifles	27,998		27,998

Source: MOND Archives (Harär), Bā Mestraqna Bā Dābub Etyopya Kā Somalia Wārari Hayl Gar Yātākahēdu Yāmākālākāl Enna Yā Māleso Matqat Wegiyawoch, 23.

Why Ethiopia won

The full-scale Somali invasion that began in July 1977 ended in a disastrous defeat of the aggressor eight months later. Several factors contributed to that defeat. To begin with, Somalia's armed forces had been trained and equipped by the Soviets for over a decade. By deploying a much larger force and superior weapons, the Somalis could roll through Ethiopian defenses, penetrating seven hundred kilometers deep into the interior. Following the expulsion of the Soviets and Cubans from Somalia, the Somali government began to face a serious shortage of vital spare parts for its Soviet-made weaponry. Meanwhile, the United States refused to arm Somalia as long as it was waging a war of aggression against Ethiopia.⁹⁹ Although some Muslim states such as Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Pakistan supplied Somalia with some equipment, they could not arm Somalia the way the Soviets did. In short, the Somali army was undersupplied.¹⁰⁰

In contrast, Ethiopia reaped the benefits of international solidarity, which turned the scale to its favor. With the arrival of Soviet military advisers and Cuban and South Yemeni troops, Ethiopian stockpiles of Soviet weapons tremendously increased. In the meantime, the Ethiopian fighting force continued to swell until it had reached seven divisions by January 1978. James Dunnigan and other military experts estimate that to carry out successful offensives, an army needs at least three or more times greater combat strength than its adversary.¹⁰¹ But Somalia lacked the demographic and economic resources to muster such force. Somalia's population was about 15 percent of that of Ethiopia. As the fighting dragged on for months, the Somalis lost the determination and lacked the resources for a protracted war.¹⁰² At the beginning of the invasion, the Ethiopian army was immensely outnumbered and

outgunned by the Somalis. Six months later, Ethiopian forces began to gain superiority in numbers and arms and pinned down the Somalis, forcing them to exhaust their human and material resources in static defense before the large-scale counteroffensive. Meanwhile, having penetrated seven hundred kilometers deep into Ethiopia, the Somalis faced a logistical nightmare. Their outstretched supply lines became highly vulnerable to Ethiopian air strikes.

The Ethiopian air force played a key role not only in reducing Somali tanks, APCs, and artillery to rubble but also in destroying MiG fighters through dogfights, thereby winning the battle for the sky. The Ethiopian air force had also the capability to destroy military targets deep inside Somalia. For instance, it bombed airfields and arms depots in Hargeisa and Berbera just before the beginning of the Ethiopian counteroffensive. Ethiopian pilots flying American-made F-5E jet fighters outmaneuvered the Somali MiG fighters. According to an Ethiopian pilot who took part in the war, “By successfully shooting down the Soviet-made Somali combat aircraft with our F-5E jets, we did a lot of promotional job for Americans.”¹⁰³ The Ethiopian air force had a reputation for experience and effective combat. Obviously, therefore, as Gebru says, “The Ethiopian domination of the air had perhaps more to do with technical skill and experience than the mere possession of a superior machine.”¹⁰⁴

Finally, according to Gebru, the Somalis “woefully underrated two critical factors: the depth of Ethiopian patriotism and the popularity of the revolution.”¹⁰⁵ The violation of Ethiopian territorial integrity by Somalia produced nationwide indignation and determination to beat off the invaders. The militiamen were so committed that they hurled hand grenades into the turrets of Somali tanks before being cut to pieces by machine guns. In the end, the Ethiopian army prevailed, first by pinning down the Somalis, then by ejecting them from the territory they had occupied.

CHAPTER SIX

Fighting the Northern Rebels (1976–1991)

The rebels besiege Naqfa

Naqfa, a small town in the former Sahel *Awraja* of northern Eritrea along the Afabét-Qarora road, resembles a shallow dish embraced by bare mountains standing shoulder to shoulder.¹ For more than a decade, these mountains were scenes of bloody engagements. During those conflicts, tens of thousands of government troops and insurgents lost their lives while trying to capture and defend Naqfa.

In May 1976, the Därg assembled 25,000 to 30,000 peasants from the northern provinces and sent them to Eritrea in an attempt, as Bahru described, “to drown the rebels under a sea of peasant humanity.”² The peasant march, named Operation Raza, was, however, a complete failure. Before even crossing into Eritrea, the peasants were ambushed by the guerrillas and forced to disperse.

Following the failure of Operation Raza and the rejection of the Därg’s Nine-Point Peace Plan by the insurgents, the military situation began to deteriorate. Two guerrilla groups, the ELF and the EPLF, attacked isolated garrisons throughout Eritrea. One such garrison that came under attack was the Fifteenth Infantry Battalion based at Naqfa.³ On September 17, 1976, the EPLF launched a close-in offensive on Naqfa to overwhelm the infantrymen there. While giving close air support to the battalion, a jet fighter was shot down by the insurgents, but the pilot managed to eject safely. Since he landed close to rebel-held areas, rescuing him was not easy. Twelve infantrymen died during the rescue operation. Though the insurgents failed to take Naqfa, they managed to put the garrison under siege. Then, they continued to tighten the siege by bringing in reinforcements, raising the total number of their fighters to about 3,000. Although they were outnumbered ten to fifteen times, the infantrymen repulsed repeated EPLF attempts to overrun the garrison during the six-month siege. Since the September EPLF offensive, the infantrymen

had been asking for either relief units to be sent overland or paratroopers to be parachuted in.⁴

In response to the anxious telegraph messages of the infantrymen, the government sent two relief units composed of the Israeli-trained Nābālbal (Flame) commandos in late September 1976. But the insurgents repulsed both forces.⁵ Disappointed by the government's failure to relieve the garrison, the battalion's commander, Major Mammo Tämtémé, sent an emotional appeal to the various units of the armed forces in mid-October 1976. Part of the message reads:

We the 200 men have been fighting day and night for a month with a larger enemy force. We shall continue to fight to the last man . . . Among us, more than 60 wounded soldiers are decomposing in agony in their foxholes. We have received no assistance in response to our continuous appeal for relief. That has made us doubt the existence of a credible and responsible government . . . We are sending this last message so as to urgently get a relief force.⁶

Deeply touched by the plea of the infantrymen, the airborne troops based at Mändāfāra, with the conviction that their training was meant for such an operation, made a solemn decision to reinforce the garrison. As a result, ninety-nine handpicked airborne troops were soon moved to Asmāra. But they had to wait for a week until jumping shoes and parachutes arrived from Addis Ababa and Dābrā Zäyet, respectively. In the meantime, the insurgents seemed to have got wind of the plan. In an attempt to forestall the planned reinforcement, they brought additional fighters and antiaircraft weapons to the Naqfa area so as to shoot down the airplanes as well as the paratroopers in the air. It was believed that antiaircraft weapons such as the ZU-23 could shoot down airplanes as high as 2,500 meters. To avoid such risks, the pilots decided to drop the paratroopers from an altitude of 3,000 meters. In enemy territory, paratroopers normally jump at an altitude of 300 to 600 meters and are not expected to stay in the air for more than two minutes. If dropped at an altitude of 3,000 meters, the parachute jumpers would be forced to hang in the air for ten minutes. It was feared that within those ten minutes, the insurgents would shoot down all the paratroopers before they could touch the ground. The pathfinder, a paratrooper sent before the main force to find and establish a safe drop zone, jumped from a helicopter escorted by F-5 jet fighters and narrowly escaped rebel fire. He landed with a bullet-riddled parachute. Although the pathfinder could not signal the airplanes about conditions on the ground, it was decided to parachute the ninety-nine paratroopers as soon as possible. As they jumped from the first aircraft in what seemed to be a suicide mission, the second plane was shot and had to return to Asmāra. With the exception of one soldier who was shot in the air, all others landed safely despite contin-

uous fire from all directions.⁷ With regard to the dangerous mission, one of the airborne troops recorded in his diary: “It is quite a miracle to have come down alive, to have escaped the hail of bullets fired at us from the ground as we dropped.”⁸

Soon after their landing, the paratroopers joined the infantrymen in pitched battles against insurgents. With close air support, they dislodged the rebel fighters from their trenches after one hour of hand-to-hand combat. The combined forces soon took control of all the strategic hills around Naqfa, including the airstrip. It was then possible to land two helicopters, which brought about thirty soldiers and evacuated the wounded. The infantrymen and the paratroopers expected the landing of more helicopters and the arrival of additional forces. But that opportunity was lost. Probably due to their preoccupation with the power struggle within the Därg in Addis Ababa, the commanders in Asmara failed to send additional troops by helicopters to Naqfa. Nor did they encourage the soldiers at Naqfa to control more strategic points. Instead, they ordered the troops to withdraw from the newly controlled areas and retreat to the trenches already built by the Fifteenth Infantry Battalion. That retreat helped the insurgents to recapture the strategic hills and put the garrison under siege once again.⁹

To accommodate the new arrivals, trenches and bunkers had to be expanded and strengthened so as to make them as impregnable as possible. Instead of being given separate defense lines, the paratroopers were mixed with the infantry so as to create intimacy and cooperation among fighters. Major (posthumously Lieutenant Colonel) Mammo Täntemé and Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier General) Täsfayé H. Maryam, the commanders of the Fifteenth Infantry Battalion and the airborne troops, respectively, began to work hand in glove with each other, and their effective leadership created an indomitable spirit among their fighters. As a result, the continuous barrage of heavy guns from the surrounding hills, the repeated attempts to overwhelm the garrison, the psychological warfare waged by the EPLF, the critical shortage of supplies, and the failure to get relief units did not sap the morale and will of the troops to resist.¹⁰

Through time, the defenders of Naqfa came to know when the insurgents would fire heavy guns and attempt to storm the garrison. They, therefore, began to take some precautionary measures. To ward off surprise attacks at night or dawn, the defenders used dogs to sense possible rebel movements and alert the troops in the trenches.¹¹

Since the beginning of the siege, supplies could reach the garrison only by air. The troops could not, however, design effective methods for retrieving supplies dropped from airplanes. The antiaircraft weapons strategically positioned around the garrison prevented the airplanes from flying at low altitude and dropping supplies. To avoid rebel fire, the airplanes were forced to parachute bundles of rations, ammunition, and medical supplies from a height

of seven hundred to eight hundred feet. It was highly risky to come out of trenches and give signals to pilots to drop the supplies on exact locations. If the parachuted supplies landed far from their positions, the insurgents would either burn them by firing explosive bullets or attack the troops trying to collect them. On several occasions, the wind blew the parachuted supplies to EPLF-controlled areas. Quite often, fierce battles were fought over supplies. Initially, many soldiers lost their lives while attempting to pick up the equipment and provisions. Later on, they preferred to allow the insurgents to collect the supplies; they would then attack the rebels. That tactic enabled the besieged troops not only to collect their supplies but also to capture weapons from the EPLF. On their part, the rebels learned a bitter lesson not to rush to dropped supplies. Thereafter, both parties refrained from taking the initiative in picking up supplies. As a result, the goods remained uncollected up to three days. In an attempt to deny the insurgents the chance of getting supplies, pilots were advised to first drop sandbags to know the wind direction and then parachute the supplies. That method worked well, and the besieged troops began to get most of the dropped supplies.¹²

As the task of snatching parachuted supplies became extremely difficult, the insurgents began to replenish their fighters with fresh supplies using vehicles and camels at night to avoid aerial bombardment. Once they brought in new provisions, weapons, and fighters, they mounted a number of surprise attacks, usually at night. They knew that the government troops had a critical shortage of ammunition. They, therefore, designed various methods to force the besieged soldiers to fire and use up their ammunition. On many occasions, the insurgents staged mock offensives at night so that their adversaries would be thrown into panic and fire all their bullets. In addition to staging mock offensives, the rebels put helmets on sticks and moved them back and forth on the horizon to dupe the troops into opening fire. Initially, the soldiers were deceived and fired many bullets on those inanimate targets before discovering that it was a trick. All such tricks and maneuvers taught the besieged troops a vital lesson. The defenders of Naqfa learned to pull a trigger only when they became sure of their targets.¹³

The insurgents were determined not only to deplete the garrison's stocks of munitions but also to weaken the besieged troops themselves at Naqfa. Apart from actual and mock offensives, the rebels planted antipersonnel mines at night around strategic hills, which were usually patrolled by troops before collecting dropped supplies. Since the besieged troops had a serious shortage of antipersonnel mines, they waited for the insurgents to plant the mines and leave the area. After the rebels left, the garrison sent its mine removal experts to painstakingly take out the antipersonnel mines and lay them along the routes the EPLF used to make surprise attacks. That plan worked very well, and many insurgents were blown up.¹⁴

When all the attempts to batter the garrison into submission failed, the

EPLF waged psychological warfare. The insurgents put megaphones on big trees and hilltops close to the garrison and tried to badger the besieged troops into surrendering. They asked the soldiers why they fought just to keep a few officers in power. The insurgents narrated their victory over the relief units and the government's inability and reluctance to send reinforcements to Naqfa. They also promised that those troops who decided to give themselves up would be sent back to their villages or would be given a chance to go abroad. The agitation was usually concluded with the declaration of a one-day cease-fire to allow time for the soldiers to discuss the offer and arrive at a decision. Upon the expiry of the cease-fire, the troops were asked about the choice they had made. Such agitations were made mostly twice a week. The psychological warfare waged by the EPLF put the morale and unity of the soldiers to a severe test. Rumors that could lead to division between the infantrymen and the airborne troops circulated around the garrison. In the end, however, that scheme, too, did not work.¹⁵

As a last resort, the insurgents employed the local people and their fighters to dig new trenches at night close to the garrison. These measures were intended to deny the besieged troops access to any supplies or airborne reinforcements by bringing all areas within close range and to enable the rebels to mount a final assault to overrun the garrison from a short distance. Since the gap between the garrison and the EPLF-held trenches was narrowing, it was difficult for pilots to drop supplies or bombard rebel positions. The insurgents calculated that the embattled troops would starve and eventually be forced to surrender.¹⁶

Starvation was in fact a daily reality at Naqfa garrison. On a number of occasions, the besieged troops went without food for seventy-two hours. The rations dropped by aircraft did not last long. Out of desperation, soldiers resorted to grinding weevil-spoiled maize, which had been stored by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission as emergency food for famished people, in their helmets and baking it on flat stones. There was no fuel to boil the corn. The rough and hastily baked bread caused diarrhea among troops. Fear of rebel fire left soldiers with only one option: to defecate inside the trenches in empty cans. Due to the absence of medical supplies, soldiers with diarrhea were left to their own devices. Even badly wounded soldiers could not get medical attention. It was not uncommon to witness wounded soldiers bleeding to death or suffering from rotting flesh while they were still alive. It was possible to move the wounded and bury the dead only under cover of darkness.

Those who were still alive had other problems. Since the soldiers were unable to change or wash their clothing, they were infested with lice. It was not unusual to see soldiers scratching their backs on the walls of trenches.¹⁷

The most pressing problem was the shortage of rations, medicine, radio batteries, and ammunition. As early as September 19, 1976, the Fifteenth Infantry Battalion commander reported that his fighters had been weakened

by starvation. When the insurgents brought the Naqfa garrison under siege on September 17, 1976, the government troops numbered only 297. Within a month, that number had declined to about 170. The infantrymen and the airborne troops continued to suffer casualties as a result of the daily barrage of heavy gunfire and repeated attempts to storm the garrison. Even after the landing of the paratroops, the request for a relief force continued. Out of the one hundred fifty telegraph messages sent during the six-month siege, eighty of them were requests for relief units.¹⁸ In late November 1976, the government again sent a relief unit of 1,700 men called the Bātes (Sever) Brigade. But the brigade was ambushed and repulsed by the insurgents after reaching the Māsahlit pass (between Kārān and Afabét). The Second Division attempted to send the brigade back to Māsahlit and then to Naqfa. But the unruly troops of the Bātes Brigade rejected orders to regroup and march to Naqfa once again.¹⁹ Following the November attempt to relieve the besieged troops, the garrison continued to send strongly worded and highly disturbing messages. On December 29, 1976, for instance, the garrison sent a direct appeal to Māngestu H. Maryam:

We have been fighting day and night against a heavily armed enemy . . . Since the enemy is now swelling the ranks of its fighters with reinforcements, we could not even fetch water. The army appeals to the government to bomb the garrison and its property with explosives before the rebels could take control of Naqfa. The army is respectfully waiting for your final decision.²⁰

Māngestu did promise that a relief force would reach Naqfa within a few days. The garrison waited for months for the arrival of relief units. Out of desperation, the garrison sent other emotional appeals. Another telegraph message sent on January 13, 1977, runs:

We did not realize that we had been thrown away to be finished off by starvation and enemy fire. Like all other human beings, we have our own families. But we have been thrown away like aging dogs. Our children and families who are longing to see us alive always receive news about our death. If we had committed mistakes, we have to be told explicitly and punished accordingly.²¹

The besieged soldiers felt that their own government had deserted them. They complained that while the EPLF managed to reinforce its fighters it seemed strange that the government with all its resources and better organization failed to do the same. Finally, they asked the government to unequivocally respond within twelve hours whether it really wanted to see the soldiers at Naqfa stay alive and defend their position.²²

At a time when a relief force was desperately needed, the Därg itself had been torn apart by a power struggle, which eventually led to the execution of Brigadier General Täfäri Banti and his associates on February 3, 1977. As a result, the issue of the Naqfa garrison seems to have been ignored. The government's failure to either relieve or reinforce the Naqfa garrison boosted the morale of the insurgents. As an ominous sign of a final assault on Naqfa, they brought in fresh fighters and new weapons. The long-awaited assault finally came on March 22, 1977. In the first two attempts to overwhelm the garrison through hand-to-hand combat, the insurgents suffered heavy casualties. In a third attempt, however, they managed to get an opening in the trenches and control a strategic post. That helped the rebels to launch a two-pronged attack on the remaining defensive positions. Many died during the hand-to-hand fighting. The foggy weather prevented any air support to the garrison. Some of those who were deeply disappointed by the government's failure to relieve them surrendered to the insurgents. In the final hours of fighting, the remaining troops destroyed documents before they fell into EPLF hands. Radio communication with Asmära was cut off. In those perilous moments, some of the last defenders shouted "forward" and rushed to EPLF lines with the intention of breaking through the ever-tightening encirclement and finding an escape route. They did manage to force their way to Afabét through an opening. On their way to Afabét, they encountered five ambushes and lost some of their fellow fighters. Finally on March 25, 1977, fifty-three infantrymen and twenty-two airborne troops succeeded in reaching Afabét after an arduous three-day march. In the end, Naqfa fell into EPLF hands.²³

The fall of Naqfa highly demoralized other garrisons throughout Eritrea. In the next few months, the EPLF controlled Afabét, Kärän, Ellabäräd, and Däqāmähari and captured many weapons. Similarly, the ELF seized Omhajar, Täsänäy, Aqordat, Mändäfära, and Adi Kuwala. Though they remained in government hands, Asmära, Bäréntu, Adi Qäyeh, and half of Meşewa were either besieged by the insurgents or had come within range of artillery fire.²⁴

The army in the Ogađen was also suffering major military reverses until late 1977. By the end of 1977, however, the military situation on the southern and southeastern fronts had turned against Somalia. The army began its counteroffensive in early 1978 and scored a major victory over Somalia in March.²⁵

The counterinsurgency push

Having beaten the Somali invaders, the army turned to northern Ethiopia to deal with the insurgency. In May 1978, the NROC was set up at Mäqälé to lead the counterinsurgency operation in northern Ethiopia. The army to be involved in the operation was organized into seven task forces, namely the 501st, 502nd, 503rd, 504th, 505th, 506th, and 507th. A total of 86,722 combat-

ants were placed under the seven task forces. Each task force was given a specific sector to retake. Accordingly, Task Force 501 was to move from Gondär to Humära, cross the Tākāzé River, and capture Omhajär and Täsänäy. Task Force 502 was assigned to set out from Sheré and march through Shämbäqo to Bärèntu, Aqordat, and Kärän. Task Force 503, on its part, would move in three directions: Adigrat to Asmära through Mändäfära, Enticho to Asmära through Şoräna, and Adi Qäyeh to Asmära through Däqämähari. Task Force 504 was ordered to hunt down insurgents in Tigray, and Task Force 505 was to break the siege around Meşewa and move to Asmära and then to Qarora. Task Force 506 was given the task of breaking the siege around Asmära and moving in four directions: Asmära-Mändäfära, Asmära-Däqämähari, Asmära-Meşewa, and Asmära-Kärän. The last task force, 507, was ordered to move from Bärèntu to Shämbäqo. Between July and December 1978, the operation went much according to plan, and the task forces scored a temporary victory through a well-coordinated offensive in Gondär, Tigray, and Eritrea.²⁶

Admittedly, the operation was achieved through enormous sacrifice. Some of the bitterest fighting took place at Ellabäräd, a valley known for its fruits and dairy products, along the Asmära-Kärän road. Task Force 506A met no resistance when it entered Ellabäräd on the evening of November 25, 1978, with all its tanks and armored vehicles. Breaking out of the surrounding hills, where they had been lurking, the EPLF fighters mounted a surprise attack on the troops who had been preparing their dinner. Radio communication was soon cut off. Task Force 506B was immediately moved to Ellabäräd as reinforcement that same night. Though it was difficult to clearly identify EPLF positions, jet fighters made more than seventy sorties to strike at rebel positions. The valley was strewn with corpses and destroyed tanks. After nearly thirty-six hours of heavy fighting, the two units of Task Force 506 drove the insurgents out of Ellabäräd.²⁷

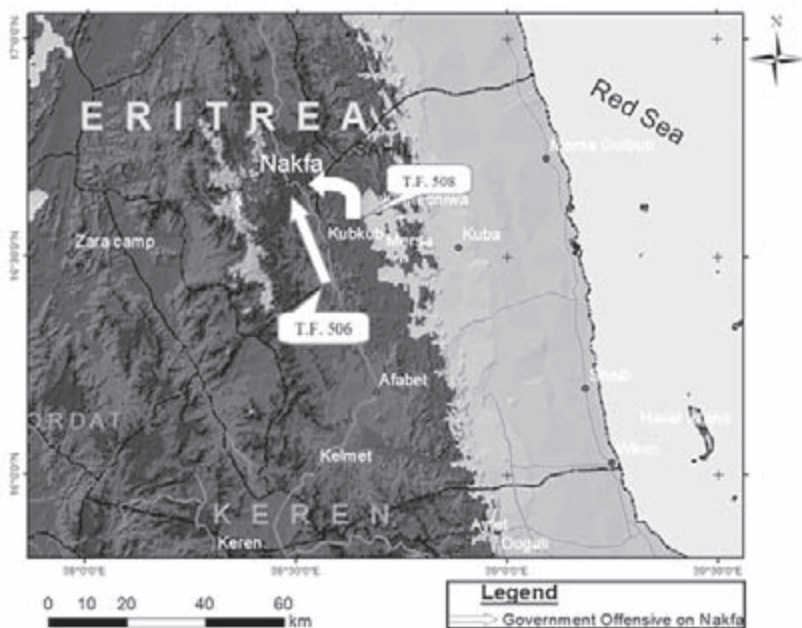
At the same time, Task Forces 501 and 502 scored a sweeping victory over the ELF and met at Aqordat. Once they achieved their goal, they merged to form Task Force 508 and regained Kärän on November 27, 1978. Following a four-day respite at Kärän, Task Forces 506 and 508 were ordered to capture Afabét and Naqfa. But the delay at Kärän helped the EPLF to strengthen its defenses at Mäsahlit. The army not only failed to overrun EPLF defenses at Mäsahlit but also was pushed back to Kärän. Following a brief period of rehabilitation, the two task forces finally managed to reach the gates of Naqfa after breaking the EPLF fortification at the Mäsahlit pass and regaining Afabét.²⁸

Storming Naqfa

To storm the last stronghold of the EPLF, army commanders worked out a new plan of operation. According to the plan, Task Forces 506 and 508 would overrun rebel defenses around Naqfa with the help of artillery fire and air

strikes. Military Intelligence believed that Naqfa was defended by four EPLF brigades (the Fifty-First, Fifty-Eighth, Seventieth, and Seventy-Seventh) with a total of 5,000 fighters. To wipe out those EPLF forces, Task Force 506A, the main strike force, would follow the course of the Tébra River from the south and advance toward Naqfa. While two brigades of Task Force 508A would surge through an elevation called hill 1925, Task Force 508B would control the strategic heights east of Naqfa between Qāy Tat and Shaña, annihilate the insurgents, and finally capture Naqfa.²⁹

Map. 5. The 1979 government offensive on Naqfa.



The various units of the two task forces were ordered to mount a frontal assault on July 14, 1979, at 0400 hours. They would advance under the cover of darkness so as to confuse the insurgents and take Naqfa. But as they came closer to the EPLF positions, their movement was exposed by moonlight, and the rebels opened fire at 0340 hours. Although they rushed into the EPLF defenses, the barrage of machine-gun fire from left and right decimated most of the troops of the first wave. The task forces sent in the second wave of troops at 0500 hours. The EPLF defenses again proved too strong to be broken. During the third offensive, troops fought tenaciously for an hour at dawn but failed to storm the EPLF defenses. The last reserve units were thrown onto EPLF positions after an artillery bombardment, which lasted for twelve minutes.

The hail of fire coming from camouflaged machine guns made any advance difficult. On July 15, 1979, the Ninth Brigade of Task Force 508 moved to the EPLF position at 0500 hours after a ten-minute artillery bombardment. But the insurgents had already planted antipersonnel mines and positioned their machine guns at vantage points. As a result, the rebels repulsed the offensives at 0500 and then at 0745 hours.³⁰

Those troops who had reached the EPLF trenches reported about the nature of the defense lines. The insurgents had built two lines of semicircular trenches. The frontline was a ditch with no overhead protection. A few meters behind the frontline defense, there was another trench strengthened by big logs, stones, and sandbags. The army did manage to overrun the frontline defenses but failed to break the second line of trenches. The insurgents had also positioned various types of light and heavy guns camouflaged and completely hidden from air strikes. Since the EPLF trenches were on the escarpment and top of the Naqfa Mountains, the army's positions in the low-lying areas appeared in clear detail before the eyes of the insurgents. The narrow and zigzag road to the town of Naqfa was heavily mined and vigilantly guarded by camouflaged weapons. The rebels had prepared their defenses in such a way that they could avoid direct hits from tanks, artillery, and combat aircraft. The semicircular defense lines enabled the insurgents to outflank assailants through a pincer maneuver. When the assailants rushed to the EPLF positions, they were machine-gunned from left and right. Then the commanders of various battalions agreed to storm the EPLF defenses from behind in a nocturnal operation. But before putting their plan into effect, they were ordered by their superiors to move to their defense perimeters.³¹

Stalemate

Between January and July 1979, the two task forces carried out a series of costly operations. Despite their overwhelming superiority in numbers and arms, the task forces failed to overrun the EPLF defenses. Although the insurgents were outnumbered about ten times, they succeeded not only in bringing the fighting to a stalemate for several months but also in pushing the army back to Afabét in November 1979. Commanders later admitted that the task forces had failed to assign a special commando unit to destroy EPLF machine guns and bombard rebel positions with mortars and artillery.³²

Between December 1979 and January 1982, the army launched no offensives in Eritrea except for a march to Rora Šalim from the Red Sea coast, which was doomed from the start.³³ In a letter dated February 5, 1981, for instance, army commanders in Eritrea were reminded to take all precautionary measures to avoid unnecessary offensives. In hindsight, Māngestu H. Maryam, then the head of state, regretted that instead of wearing down and finishing off the insurgents at Naqfa in a relentless campaign, the government

allowed them to recover from their losses by suspending military operations for a couple of years. For him, that was a huge tactical blunder, which contributed to the undoing of the later Operation Red Star.³⁴

Despite the failure of the repeated attempts to capture Naqfa in 1979, the government believed that it was still possible to wipe out the Eritrean insurgents altogether through a well-planned military operation employing infantry units specially trained in mountain warfare. To that end, four mountain ranger units, namely the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Second MIDs, were organized and trained in 1980 and 1981. Recruited voluntarily and given an extended special training, the first two MIDs (that is, the Eighteenth and Nineteenth) were revered for their combat competence and high morale.³⁵

In addition to the creation of the mountain infantry divisions, the government took two other measures intended to contribute to the successful execution of the planned operation. On the diplomatic front, Māngestu made an accord with the Sudanese president, Ja'afar Muhammad al-Nimeiri, during his visit to Khartoum, Sudan, in May 1980. Nimeiri, who also visited Ethiopia in November 1980, agreed to deny the Eritrean insurgents free movement in Sudanese territory and to allow the Ethiopian army to cross the border so as to cut off EPLF supply lines. Since the Sudanese government had been allowing the Eritrean rebels to open offices and to set up training centers, supply depots, repair shops, and medical facilities in its territory, the agreement was hoped to benefit the Ethiopian government. But the conciliatory mood of the Sudanese government proved to be temporary.³⁶

While the agreement was being concluded with Sudan, the Ethiopian government launched a campaign named Operation Lash in September 1980 in the Ogadén. The operation aimed at dealing a final blow to Somali insurgency in the Ogadén so that the army could turn against the Eritrean rebels in full force. Within a matter of three months, the army dealt a crushing defeat to the Somali insurgents.³⁷

The EPLF gains strength

Likewise, the EPLF wanted to avoid a two-front attack during the imminent government onslaught. The temporary suspension of military operations by the government enabled the EPLF to wage a war of liquidation on the ELF in 1980–1981. Backed by the TPLF, the EPLF finally routed the ELF, forcing its remnants to flee to Sudan. By the end of 1981, the EPLF was the only rebel group ready to face the impending government offensive.³⁸

Before the launching of Operation Red Star, the EPLF took other measures to strengthen its defenses around Naqfa and weaken the government's capability. For about seven months, the EPLF rebels had been digging new bunkers, trenches, and foxholes around Naqfa. Aerial photographs taken be-

fore the operation revealed that the EPLF had already prepared three rings of trenches around the town.³⁹ Having strengthened its defenses, the EPLF mounted a preemptive strike on government positions. On January 23, 1982, an EPLF commando unit attacked the Thirty-Fifth Brigade headquarters in Asmāra. The guerrilla raid was intended to demoralize one of the elite units of the Eighteenth Mountain Infantry Division.⁴⁰

Operation Red Star

The government finally launched the widely publicized Operation Red Star in February 1982. It believed that the Eritrean insurgency could be stamped out with the capture of Naqfa, the last stronghold of the EPLF. The army to be engaged in the operation was organized into five commands: Nadāw, Weqaw, Mäbrāq, Mäket, and Ma'ekälawi. According to the plan of operation, the Nadāw, Weqaw, and Mäbrāq Commands would mount a three-pronged offensive on the Naqfa, Algéna, and Kärkäbät fronts, respectively. The tasks of the other two commands were less demanding. While the Mäket Command was assigned to remain vigilant in and around Asmāra, the Central Command had to escort convoys and safeguard major government installations in Gondär, Tigray, and southern Eritrea.⁴¹

To lead this huge campaign, the Military Operations and Planning Command (MOPC) was set up in Asmāra. The MOPC included Māngestu H. Maryam, the commander in chief; General Täsfayé G. Kidan, the defense minister; General Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, the chief of staff; and commanders of the air force and the navy as well as Soviet military advisers. Pinning much hope on the specially trained units, the MOPC brought the four mountain infantry divisions to Eritrea. The most eminent, the Eighteenth Mountain Infantry Division, was put on reserve; the Nineteenth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Second MIDs were placed under the Weqaw, Mäbrāq, and Nadāw Commands, respectively.⁴²

Each command was given a specific target. Led by Brigadier General (later Major General) Abärä Abbäbä, the Weqaw Command was assigned to cut off EPLF routes to Sudan, block the Algéna-Naqfa road, and wipe out the insurgents around Algéna. The command consisted of the Nineteenth MID and the Fifteenth and Twenty-Third Infantry Divisions. It deployed 21,581 troops armed with 49 tanks, 44 armored vehicles, 84 field artillery, 162 mortars, and 60 anti-aircraft guns.

Put under the leadership of Brigadier General Wubātu Šäggayé, the Nadāw Command was ordered to cut off the rebels around Naqfa from those of Algéna, annihilate them, and capture their last stronghold, Naqfa. The command included such combat-hardened army units as the Third and Seventeenth Infantry Divisions and the Twenty-Second MID. The command deployed 20,801 troops with 19 tanks, 16 armored vehicles, 99 field artillery, 198 mortars, and 58 anti-aircraft guns.

Assigned to open a third front at the EPLF's rear base, the Mäbräq Command, led by Brigadier General Qumlachäw Däjäné, was assigned to close all EPLF exits to Sudan and capture its bases in the Barka lowlands. The command was composed of 24,367 troops armed with 31 tanks, 34 armored vehicles, 88 field artillery, 204 mortars, and 67 antiaircraft guns.⁴³ The command's three divisions (the Second and Twenty-Fourth Infantry and the Twenty-First Mountain Infantry) included eight infantry brigades (four of them mountain infantry), a paracommando brigade, three tank battalions, three artillery battalions, a mechanized brigade (the well-known Sānteq), and two antiaircraft battalions.⁴⁴

Before this elaborate plan was put into action, the insurgents managed to discover the blueprints of the whole operation to the last detail.⁴⁵ To the government's great dismay, the plan of operation had even leaked out, and commanders who were supposed to lead the operation appeared in *Africa Confidential*, a British-owned newsletter covering politics in Africa. Even then, the government went on with the operation without any change of plan.⁴⁶ It, however, tried to find out the total number of EPLF fighters and their firepower. According to a government intelligence report, the EPLF had deployed 20,000 to 25,000 fighters, including the nearly 3,000 fighters sent by the TPLF for assistance. If the report is to be believed, the EPLF was armed with fifteen tanks, fourteen armored vehicles, sixteen field artillery, sixty-three mortars, and fourteen antiaircraft guns on the three fronts.⁴⁷

Although the insurgents were immensely outnumbered in both manpower and equipment, they were determined to hold their positions. They had even decided to take the initiative instead of waiting for the government onslaught. Accordingly, just three days before the beginning of the government offensive, they mounted a preemptive attack on the Fortieth and Forty-First Brigades of the Weqaw Command so as to disrupt the operation. As a result of the heavy fighting that followed, 1,244 troops of the Nineteenth MID were put out of action. The Fortieth and Forty-First Brigades were finally rescued by the Thirty-Ninth Mountain Infantry Brigade, which pushed the insurgents back with artillery fire and air strikes. The Fortieth and Forty-First brigades were soon rehabilitated and put into their original positions.⁴⁸

Despite the disruption of the Weqaw Command, the long-awaited operation was launched according to plan on February 15, 1982, on all three fronts. On the Algéna front, the three divisions of the Weqaw Command moved to their targets with some initial success. The Fifteenth Infantry Division crossed the Ethiopian-Sudanese border at Qarora and managed to block EPLF movements to Sudan by bringing Jäbäl Dämbäbit, a strategic hill, under control. The Twenty-Third Division, too, made a good advance and controlled Belqat and Fah, where the insurgents set up arms depots and health stations. It then moved farther south toward Afchäwa to block the Algéna-Naqfa road so that the rebels could not help one another. Due to a rebel counteroffensive, however, the Twenty-Third Division was pushed back to its original position. At

the same time, the Nineteenth MID mounted a frontal attack on rebel positions and captured Tameru and Katar, two strategic hills southwest of Algéna. But stiff resistance from the insurgents halted its farther advance. Despite the intensive use of tanks, artillery fire, and air strikes, the division failed to capture the strategic pass of Adobayah. The EPLF trenches proved impregnable, and the terrain favored the insurgents.⁴⁹

During the second phase of the offensive, three new brigades (the Twenty-First, Ninety-Third, and 104th) were brought from the Ogadén to the Algéna front to replace losses. Reinforced by the Ninety-Third Brigade, the Twenty-Third Division was ordered to recapture the areas it had controlled during the first phase. In spite of repeated attempts to overrun EPLF defenses, the division failed to move forward. The three divisions were again ordered to move to their respective targets. All were ejected from the areas they controlled. During the third phase, while the Nineteenth and Twenty-Third Divisions were put on defensive positions, the Fifteenth Division was brought from Qarora and ordered to advance toward the Algéna-Naqfa road. Although it had occupied some strategic points, the Fifteenth Division was beaten off by the insurgents. The offensive attempted in the three phases on the Algéna front was finally called off in favor of defense.⁵⁰

The military situation on the Kärkábät front was even worse for the Mäbräq Command. Initially, all three units moved to their targets without much difficulty. While the Second Division marched to Halhal from Kärän, the Twenty-Fourth Division moved toward Sata from Kärkábät. The other unit, the Twenty-First MID, captured Kur, a strategic point in the Barka lowlands, with no fighting. The insurgents seemed to have discovered that the Twenty-First MID had just arrived from training camp with no combat experience. The rebel forces, who had entrenched themselves at a strategic pass near Kur, halted the advances of the division. As the division began to retreat on February 20, 1982, the insurgents sent outflanking units and attacked the retreating troops from left and right with heavy guns. The only watering hole, which was under the division's control, fell into EPLF hands. Military vehicles could not move on the sandy plains of Kärkábät. The troops were exposed to a barrage of fire and suffered from dehydration during the confused retreat. As a result, a considerable number of soldiers were killed or wounded. On February 23, a team led by Brigadier General (later Major General) Mulatu Nägash moved to Kärkábät to investigate the reasons for the collapse of the Twenty-First MID.⁵¹ The team held the division commander, Colonel Wubshät Mammo, responsible for the disaster. The commander was executed by firing squad at Afabét.⁵²

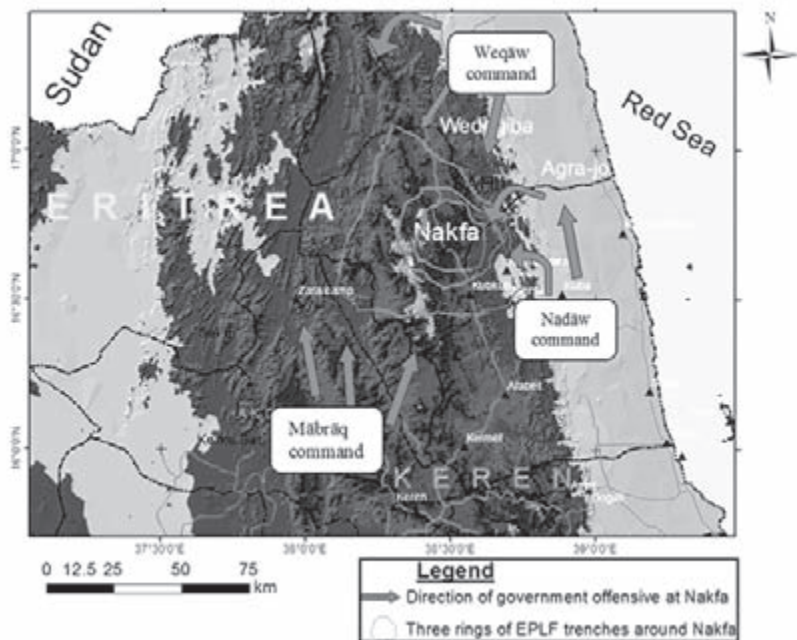
The damage inflicted on the Twenty-First MID highly demoralized other units of the Mäbräq Command. Fearing another disaster, the Second and Twenty-Fourth Divisions were pulled out and returned to base. A tactical blunder was committed. Instead of rehabilitating the troops and engaging the

insurgents, the operation on the Kärkäbät front was called off. That mistake enabled the EPLF to quickly transfer its fighters to the Naqfa front.⁵³

It was on the Naqfa front that the insurgents faced an overwhelming onslaught from the Nadāw Command. The command assigned the Third and Seventeenth Infantry Divisions to storm Naqfa from the north and east, respectively, after cutting off the Naqfa-Algéna road. The other unit of the Nadāw Command, the Twenty-Second MID, was to carry out mock offensives in the EPLF's southern sector, escort convoys to the battle zone, and secure the environs of Afabét. One of the army units that came close to victory was the Third Division. The division, according to Gebru, "deceptively moved toward Algéna parallel to the coast and then suddenly turned left and with extraordinary speed and tactical efficiency" to storm EPLF positions north of Naqfa.⁵⁴ While one unit of the Third Division advanced to the west to block the Naqfa-Algéna road, another surged through EPLF defenses in a bold thrust toward the town of Naqfa. At the same time, the Seventeenth Division deployed its brigades from Tiksi to capture the strategic heights surrounding Naqfa from the north and east. Two days after zero hour, the Eleventh and Nineteenth Infantry Brigades captured two strategic heights: hills 1590 and 1702, respectively. On February 19 and 20, while the Nineteenth Brigade took two more hills, 1725 and 1755, the Eleventh Brigade controlled height 1527. The capture of such strategic points brought the assailants only four kilometers from the town of Naqfa. The insurgents were thrown into panic as the Third and Seventeenth Divisions continued their deep thrust to take Naqfa.⁵⁵

At this critical moment, the EPLF quickly moved in noncombatants, such as carpenters, mechanics, health workers, and political cadres (who had received training in defensive and offensive tactics earlier), to the front to save Naqfa from falling into government hands.⁵⁶ On February 23, 1982, using tanks, artillery, mortars, and Zu-23 antiaircraft weapons, the insurgents pushed the Third Division back to Tiksi and forced the Seventeenth Division to abandon the strategic heights it had occupied. The division commander, Colonel Mäkonnen Woldé, died during this fierce fighting. The Eighteenth MID, which had been left on reserve, was brought to Tiksi on February 24, 1982. One of its units, the Thirty-Sixth Brigade, was ordered to retake the heights (hills 1725 and 1755) lost to the EPLF. On February 26, 1982, while the Thirty-Sixth Brigade and the Third Division were advancing toward Naqfa, the insurgents swiftly moved additional fighters from Algéna and desperately attacked the various units (the Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Brigades) of the Third Division. The Third Division lost its commander, Colonel Tāshagär Yemam, and was forced to retreat. Then the rebels encircled the Thirty-Sixth Mountain Infantry Brigade and tied it down in static defense. Two battalions of the Thirty-Eighth Mountain Infantry Brigade finally rescued the brigade.⁵⁷

Map 6. Operation Red Star.



With the arrival of the Twenty-Fourth Division from the Kärkäbät front, the battle entered its second phase. While the Third Division pulled back for rehabilitation, the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Twenty-Fourth Divisions tried to retake the strategic heights still controlled by the EPLF. Although the Seventeenth Division succeeded in recapturing hill 1702 on March 3, 1982, it was ejected the next day. While the Eighteenth MID was trying to take low-lying points, its own helicopters and jet fighters mistakenly struck it. The attempt to retake height 1702 failed due to a barrage of fire from EPLF machine guns well positioned on the hill. After a brief period of rehabilitation, the Third Division again moved to its former position. Between March 10 and 20, 1982, the Twenty-Fourth Division tried in vain to recapture hill 1702 by employing occasional hand-to-hand combat.⁵⁸

During the third phase of the operation, the Second Division (which had been deployed on the Kärkäbät front) was brought in to reinforce the Nadāw Command. Whereas the Third Division was put on reserve, the Second, Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Twenty-Fourth Divisions were ordered to mount a frontal attack on EPLF positions in north-south and east-west directions. In an attempt to reverse the military situation, the command set up two battalions of volunteers who were ready for a suicide mission. Armed with auto-

matic assault rifles, bayonets, and hand grenades, the volunteers attempted to force their way to the strategic heights. Despite the immeasurable valor and sacrifice of the volunteers, hill 1702 could not be recaptured.

The commanders continued to throw in more troops, hoping that the insurgents would eventually be forced to give up. During the fourth phase, the Twenty-First MID, which had lost many troops in the sands of Kärkäbāt, was put under the Nadāw Command.⁵⁹ That brought the number of army units on the Naqfa front to seven divisions. During this phase, while the Third and Seventeenth Divisions (which probably sustained the heaviest casualties) were put on reserve, the Second, Eighteenth, Twenty-First, Twenty-Second, and Twenty-Fourth Divisions tried to dislodge the insurgents from their trenches on their respective fronts. The rebels first forced the Second Division to retreat and then halted the advance of the remaining four divisions.⁶⁰

So far, all the divisions had tried to storm EPLF positions to the north and east of Naqfa. During the last phase of the operation, fought in late May and early June 1982, the Twenty-First and Twenty-Second Mountain Infantry Divisions were deployed from Afabēt to control Naqfa from the south. Although the divisions captured some heights, such as Amba, they failed to overrun the EPLF defenses. On the other hand, some units of the Nadāw Command managed to get in touch with the Fifteenth Division of the Weqaw Command so as to deny the insurgents access to the Red Sea. Finally, in June 1982, the government halted its offensive, and all commands were ordered to stay in active defense on their respective fronts. On the whole, the attempt to wipe out the insurgents and capture Naqfa was almost a complete failure.⁶¹

Why did Operation Red Star fail?

Between 1978 and 1982, both the government and the EPLF suffered enormous casualties. According to the archives of the Ministry of National Defense, during the 1978–1979 counteroffensive and Operation Red Star, 115,857 government troops and 35,313 rebel fighters were put out of action.⁶² During Operation Red Star alone, the government and the rebels sustained 37,176 and about 15,000 casualties, respectively.⁶³

Although both sides suffered heavy casualties, the insurgents emerged morally stronger since they had successfully defended their strongholds. But the big question is why the government failed to crush the EPLF and capture Naqfa. A number of factors seem to have contributed to the failure of Operation Red Star. To begin with, the Sahel Mountains around Naqfa where the rebels were entrenched rendered the colossal onslaught by the government ineffectual. The mountainous terrain favored defense rather than offense. Moreover, thanks to the publicity for the operation, the insurgents had already built impregnable trenches around Naqfa, positioned their weapons at strategic locations, and stored supplies for extended fighting. Once everything

was in place, the rebels made a firm resolve to defend their last stronghold. Five years earlier, the besieged government troops at Naqfa were equally determined to defend their positions and repulsed repeated EPLF offensives. The will of the insurgents to resist, coupled with a suitable terrain for defense, made the capture of Naqfa more difficult than was previously thought. That explains the failure of Operation Red Star, but only partly.⁶⁴

The government also contributed to the failure of its own operation not only by deploying an army division with no combat experience but also by pulling out the Mäbräq Command from the Kärkäbät front. On that front, there were still possibilities of redeploying troops, threatening the EPLF's rear bases, and forcing it to stretch its fighters over a wider combat zone. The withdrawal of the Mäbräq Command from Kärkäbät thus enabled the insurgents to transfer fighters to the Naqfa front.⁶⁵

The rigidity of the command structure and the distance between the Al-géna, Naqfa, and Kärkäbät fronts made cooperation and coordination among the three commands a difficult exercise. The inflexibility of the command system also left no room for independent action by junior commanders. By the time approval was obtained for an action, the reality on the ground had usually changed. In contrast, the EPLF had given *carte blanche* to its commanders at all levels to take any measure deemed advisable.

Apart from institutional problems, tactical and disciplinary drawbacks hampered the army's operation. Due to fear of being mistakenly struck by friendly fire, the army failed to move to EPLF positions under the cover of artillery fire and aerial bombardment. The army's inability to move swiftly to the EPLF trenches soon after artillery fire and air strikes usually helped the insurgents to regroup quickly.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the artillery fire and air strikes failed to demolish rebel trenches. Once the army captured a strategic point, it could not swiftly consolidate its position and withstand EPLF counteroffensives. The troops, particularly the Twenty-First Mountain Infantry Division, panicked at the sound of a counteroffensive by the EPLF's flanking units, and that panic quite often led to a breakdown in the chain of command. Many soldiers ran for their lives, leaving weapons behind, instead of making an orderly retreat.⁶⁷

The army had also a serious deficiency in gathering vital intelligence about the insurgents. Conversely, the rebels established an efficient intelligence network that could access top military secrets. They were able to intercept radio messages and decipher military codes. They were also reported to have infiltrated the military hierarchy and to be in a position to get plans of operation.⁶⁸ Underestimating all such capabilities of the insurgents, the government attempted to prevail by sheer weight of numbers and superior firepower. In the final analysis, Operation Red Star turned out to be a costly campaign with little success.

The EPLF on the march

Following the failure of Operation Red Star, the army remained in its defensive position until new recruits replaced its losses. The Mänter Command replaced the Mäbräq Command, which had fizzled out at the beginning of the operation. While the government was still trying to rehabilitate and reorganize the army, the Military Intelligence unit learned that the EPLF was preparing to launch a major offensive in February 1983. To disrupt the intended offensive, the government decided to mount a preemptive strike on EPLF positions.⁶⁹

This time, the government seems to have drawn a painful lesson from Operation Red Star. To surprise the EPLF, the plan of the 1983 operation was kept in absolute secrecy, hence the name “the Stealth Offensive.”⁷⁰ Just before the launching of the offensive, the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Divisions and the Twenty-Ninth Mechanized Brigade of the Weqaw Command were moved to Afabét to reinforce the Nadāw and Mänter commands, leaving only the Twenty-Third Division at Algéna. Then in February 1983, the various units of the Nadāw and Mänter commands attacked EPLF positions on the Kubkub, Halhal, and Barka fronts. Through a U-shaped coordinated offensive, the army captured some strategic points, such as Etaba, Gir, Mäläbso, Asmat, Kur, and Tärit on the Barka and Halhal fronts and blocked EPLF routes to Sudan. On the Kubkub front, the Nadāw units also controlled a few strategic heights, such as hill 2595. In June 1983, however, the insurgents recaptured all those areas, with the exception of Mäläbso, through a surprise attack. During the February offensive and the EPLF counteroffensive, 17,648 government troops were put out of action.⁷¹

After the June counteroffensive, the EPLF snatched the initiative. The insurgents began to carefully study and strike the soft spots of the government forces. In December 1983, they captured the town of Täsänäy in western Eritrea in a surprise attack. Then in January 1984, they encircled the Twenty-Third Division, the only army unit of the Weqaw Command still stationed at Algéna. The insurgents were beaten back, leaving behind a considerable number of military vehicles, antiaircraft weapons, machine guns, and small arms. A month later, a larger EPLF force overwhelmed the Weqaw Command at Algéna. After forty-eight hours of fierce fighting, the insurgents destroyed the command. The remaining government troops retreated with their tanks and artillery and joined the Nadāw Command at Afabét. The Weqaw Command lost 3,639 troops. The material loss was estimated at 43,565,659 birr (about U.S. \$21 million). The February offensive enabled the EPLF to control the whole of the Red Sea coast from Qarora to Meṣewa.⁷²

Worse still, on May 20, 1984, at 2330 hours, EPLF commandos penetrated the strongly fenced and mined perimeter of Asmära airport. The commandos

destroyed ten airplanes (six MiG-23s, two Ilyushins, and two helicopters) and damaged eight others (two MiG-23s, five MiG-21s, and one Dash-5) in a nocturnal raid.⁷³

A year later, on July 5, 1985, the insurgents mounted a surprise attack on the town of Bärèntu at 1800 hours. For the first time, Bärèntu fell into EPLF hands after twenty-four hours of heavy fighting. While trying to defend Bärèntu, 5,617 government troops were put out of action (1,389 killed, 2,476 wounded, and 1,752 missing in action). With the intention of regaining western Eritrea, the government planned another campaign named Operation Red Sea. To reinforce the 68,811 troops stationed in Eritrea, 21,369 soldiers were gathered from the Eastern and Southern Commands as well as the Holäta and Hurso Military Academies. Operation Red Sea involved four infantry divisions, a mechanized division, and two additional mechanized brigades. The army began its operation in late August 1985 and regained Bärèntu, Täsänäy, Ali Gidär, and Haykota within a matter of two weeks. It also captured the main EPLF training camp, Sawa Forto.⁷⁴ Unlike the Sahel Mountains, the zones of operation in the western lowlands were suitable for tank battle, artillery fire, and air strikes. The government troops effectively used those weapons in the open plains and swept across vast areas, inflicting heavy damage on the EPLF.

Operation Bahrä Nägash

The success of Operation Red Sea encouraged the government to plan another huge campaign known as Operation Bahrä Nägash. It was the last attempt to capture Naqfa. Mängestu H. Maryam single-handedly planned Operation Bahrä Nägash. According to him, the capture of Naqfa, which had evaded the army for the preceding six years, could be achieved through a coordinated offensive by well-trained armored and motorized units in collaboration with marine commandos and paratroopers. Mängestu envisaged that the air force would carry out saturation bombing of the EPLF defenses around Naqfa to open the way for a lightning strike by infantry units and paratroopers. Then, mechanized units would destroy the EPLF training camps and arms depots in its rear sector and cut off its supply lines. In the meantime, marine commandos would sail from Meşewa to Mälka Fatuma and then sweep through the sandy plains to Algéna. To make surprise an essential element of the operation, the paratroopers would be dropped behind EPLF lines and would storm command posts and nerve centers. Finally, the infantry units would overwhelm the insurgents at Naqfa and capture their last stronghold.⁷⁵

The planned operation called for a huge preparation. Training camps had to be expanded. At Awash Arba, another training camp was established for armored, tank, and artillery units. The Hurso camp was devoted to the training of officers. The government believed that, due to their rigorous training,

the airborne units would play a key role in bringing the planned operation to a successful conclusion. Accordingly, the airborne brigades were raised to division level, making Ethiopia the only country in the continent with an airborne division. Such a powerful force had to be armed with state-of-the-art weaponry. To that end, Māngestu led a delegation composed of high-ranking officials and senior military commanders to the Soviet Union some time before Operation Bahrä Nāgash. This time, Māngestu earnestly asked for a sizable number of fighter and transport helicopters. The Kremlin officials reluctantly gave Māngestu a squadron of helicopter gunships and another squadron of transport helicopters (three-fourths of what he requested). In contrast, tanks and artillery pieces were acquired without much difficulty.⁷⁶

Having acquired most of the required weaponry, the government reorganized and deployed four divisions in Eritrea. The newly organized Bārged Command included the Twenty-First Mountain, the Twenty-Third Infantry, and the 102nd Airborne Divisions, and the Sixteenth and Twenty-Ninth Mechanized Brigades. Its auxiliary units were the Tenth Ballistic Missile Rocket Battalion and the Forty-Second and 157th Artillery Battalions. With its total of 17,081 troops, the Bārged Command was to be deployed on the Algēna front.

The Nadāw Command on the Naqfa front was composed of the Nineteenth and Twenty-Second MIDs; the Twenty-Seventh Mechanized Brigade; the Twenty-Sixth, Forty-First, and Forty-Third Artillery Battalions; the Ninth Ballistic Missile Rocket Battalion; and the 401st Tank Battalion, with a total of 12,781 combatants.

On the Mälābso front, the Mānter Command consisted of 10,842 troops organized under the Eighteenth Mountain and the Third Infantry Divisions, and the Eighth Ballistic Missile Rocket, the Seventy-Sixth Tank, and the 147th and 285th Artillery Battalions.

Deployed on the Kārkābāt-Sata front were separate units, such as the Second Mechanized Division and the Eighth and Eighty-Ninth Infantry Brigades with a total of 5,139 troops. On the whole, 45,843 troops were arrayed against the insurgents on all four fronts. In addition, the Māket Command was assigned to gather militia units from the highlands of Eritrea and the Red Sea coast, secure Asmāra and the port of Meṣewa, and escort army convoys to the various fronts.⁷⁷

Just before the launching of the operation, Māngestu held a meeting with senior commanders in Asmāra. The commanders assured him that the operation would achieve 99 percent of its objective. Māngestu made a last-minute correction in the plan. The Airborne Division had been put on reserve. But Māngestu ordered his commanders to use it as a vanguard strike force. Then Māngestu returned to Addis Ababa, leaving his commanders in charge of the whole operation to avoid any complaints of interference. (Māngestu had been informed by his security men that the senior commanders attributed the fail-

ures of earlier operations to meddling from the commander in chief.)⁷⁸ Each command was given a specific plan of operation. The Bārged Command was expected to move one airborne brigade from Afabét to Katar and Tameru hills by helicopter, transport another brigade of airborne troops from Asmära and parachute them into Algéna, and move a third airborne brigade from Meşewa to Mälka Fatuma and then to Algéna. After capturing strategic hills, such as Katar, the airborne troops were supposed to surprise the insurgents on the Algéna front. In the meantime, the infantry and mechanized units would move from Afabét to Algéna by military vehicles and, in collaboration with the paratroopers, would control EPLF supply centers in the Adobah and Tabah valleys.⁷⁹

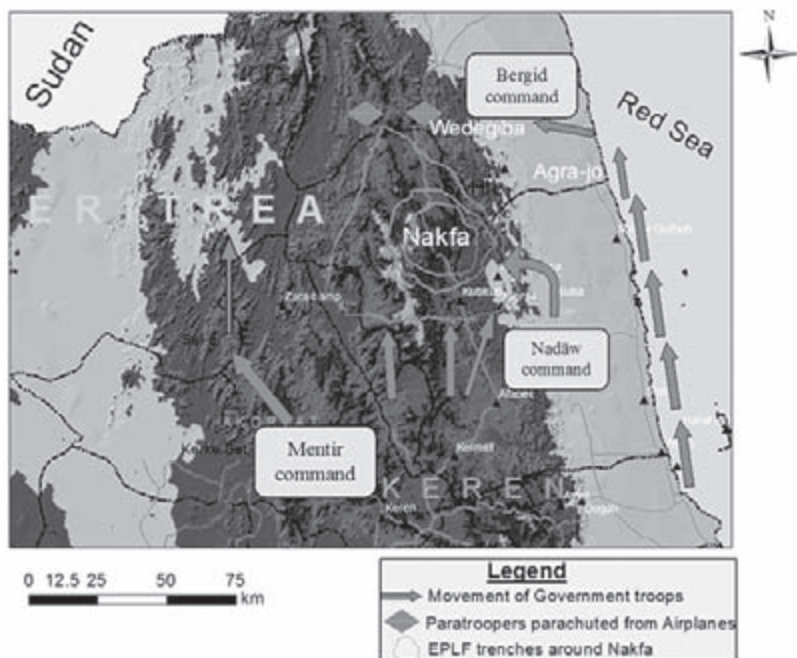
The Nadāw Command was assigned to overrun the EPLF defenses, capture Naqfa, and open up the Naqfa-Algéna road so as to get in touch with the Bārged Command. The Mānter Command on the Mäläbso front was ordered to capture Asmat and then Kur and Tärit. The Second Mechanized Division, with all its auxiliary units on the Kärkăbăt-Sata front, would cut off EPLF supply lines and block the insurgents' retreats to Sudan.⁸⁰

The failure of Operation Bahrä Nāgash

Although the morale and preparedness of the combatants was high, Operation Bahrä Nāgash was doomed from the outset. On D-Day (that is, October 10, 1985), Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier General) Bāhaylu Kendé, deputy commander of the 102nd Airborne Division, led twelve helicopters to the Algéna front. When his troops began to take positions around the Katar hills, he was suddenly told that there was a change of plan.⁸¹ The remaining paratroopers, who were to be transported from Afabét to Katar and Tameru hills by helicopter, were to join the infantry at Afabét and move to Algéna by vehicles. The other airborne units that were supposed to land at Mälka Fatuma at 600 hours did not reach the port until 1700 hours due to technical problems with the landing craft created by saboteurs. Similarly, there was considerable delay in moving paratroopers from Asmära and parachuting them at Algéna due to a shortage of airplanes. The troops who moved from Afabét to Algéna camped at the foot of Katar and Tameru hills instead of capturing the strategic heights. Likewise, the paratroopers who jumped at Algéna were not immediately moved to their targets.

The considerable delay helped the insurgents to move fighters from Naqfa to Algéna and control the Katar and Tameru hills at 0100 hour. They strengthened their old trenches and positioned their machine guns at strategic locations. For the government troops, it was already too late to mount any meaningful offensive. When the infantrymen and airborne troops moved to their targets, they were caught by EPLF fire from well-positioned machine guns. As a result, they were forced to fall back to Algéna.

Map 7. Operation Bahrä Nāgash.



The military situation on the other fronts was even worse. The army failed either to capture strategic heights around Naqfa or to attack the EPLF's rear sector. Apart from the capture of Algéna and Qarora, the first phase of the operation ended in failure in less than two weeks.⁸²

There was a change of plan for the second phase of the operation. Accordingly, the Nadāw Command was ordered to mount a frontal assault after being reinforced by the 102nd Airborne Division. The other commands remained in their defensive positions. Just before the launching of the second-phase offensive, troops of the 102nd Airborne Division were brought to the Naqfa front and were given special training that would enable them to storm Naqfa. Since the insurgents had positioned their machine guns at strategic locations and planted mines along their defense lines, the commanders came to conclude that Naqfa could only be captured through a nocturnal operation. On November 12, 1985, at 2000 hours, the Nadāw Command launched the second phase of Operation Bahrä Nāgash. A forty-minute artillery bombardment and the clearing of landmines by the army engineers preceded the advance to EPLF positions.

With the exception of a few lucky ones, most of the troops of the first wave were machine-gunned or blown up by antipersonnel mines. The Sixth Air-

borne Brigade and the Eighteenth Mountain Infantry Division fought with extraordinary courage and tried to overwhelm the rebels. As usual, the insurgents counterattacked by flanking units from left and right and forced the government forces to retreat. A couple of weeks later, the offensive on the Naqfa front was called off before it could cause a staggering depletion of manpower. In the first and second phases of the operation, 14,442 government troops were put out of action (3,545 killed, 10,374 wounded, and 523 missing in action).⁸³

The Operations Department singled out four factors behind the failure of Operation Bahrä Nāgash: the army's inability to withstand the EPLF counter-offensive, the inadequate use of heavy weapons to demolish EPLF trenches, the incompetence of commanders to deal with changing circumstances, and delays in setting up command posts soon after the army's offensive.⁸⁴ On his part, Māngestu put the blame on senior commanders for proving to be incompetent under changing circumstances.⁸⁵

On the other hand, the Military Intelligence unit pointed out a number of EPLF strengths. Among other things, the insurgents could build strong trenches and bunkers within a short time. They were able to crawl to government positions with absolute silence and launch surprise attacks. To avoid air strikes, they usually carried out attacks during bad weather. When the army mounted a frontal offensive, they often sent outflanking units to cut off the assailants. After capturing a given point, they swiftly moved machine guns to give cover to their fighters and repulse counterattacks. Machine guns and other weapons were positioned to achieve maximum result. When the army captured strategic points, the insurgents usually launched an immediate counteroffensive and ejected the army from the areas captured. Whenever necessary, they deliberately retreated to lure the government troops to traps from which they could not escape. The rebels could rotate fighters even during heavy fighting. They could also move fast and easily with their arms and small supplies. Most importantly, as has been the case during earlier operations, the Naqfa Mountains favored EPLF defenses and made the government offensive a nightmare.⁸⁶

The rebels seize the advantage

Soon after the end of Operation Bahrä Nāgash, the insurgents snatched the initiative once again and began a large-scale counteroffensive on the Halhal front. The Twenty-Second Mountain Infantry Division was moved from the Naqfa to the Halhal front and tried in vain to check the EPLF counteroffensive. The army could only stop the advance of the insurgents after the arrival of the 102nd Airborne Division. When the rebels threatened the security of Asmāra and its environs, the Airborne Division was sent back to Asmāra.⁸⁷

On January 14, 1986, the EPLF mounted another commando raid on

Asmāra airfield and destroyed several airplanes and set the ammunition and fuel depots on fire.⁸⁸ The attack proved the vulnerability of even the maximum security zones in Asmāra.

Between 1976 and 1986, the Sahel Mountains surrounding the town of Naqfa witnessed probably the bloodiest fighting in the history of Ethiopia. The MOND archives reveal that the government lost 196,944 troops in Eritrea alone between 1977 and 1986.⁸⁹ A considerable number of those soldiers died during the battles for Naqfa.

For the government, in the words of Major Dawit W. Giorgis, a one-time administrator of Eritrea, “Capturing the town [Naqfa] was equated with the final solution to the Eritrean problem. The truth of the matter was that Naqfa didn’t matter that much; won or lost . . . It might be a temporary setback, but not the ‘final blow.’”⁹⁰ In all the major offensives, the government attempted to take advantage of its numerical supremacy, for, as Kevin Ruane says, “Conventional military wisdom suggested that the only way to defeat a guerrilla army was to overwhelm it with numbers.”⁹¹

The operations to capture Naqfa failed not because the government troops were inferior in fighting abilities to the insurgents. Some units, such as the Eighteenth Mountain, the Third and Seventeenth Infantry, and the 102nd Airborne Divisions, fought with exceptional spirit, high morale, and firm resolve. If one accepts Napoleon Bonaparte’s maxim that “three-quarters of war is a matter of morale,” why then did these famed divisions, known for high morale, fail to take Naqfa? The same military genius points out some of the factors that may lead to the undoing of military operations: “In mountain war, he who attacks is at a disadvantage.” Napoleon also warns commanders to “avoid the field of battle that he [the enemy] has reconnoitered and studied. Be even more careful to avoid one that he has fortified and where he has entrenched himself.”⁹² Not only were the mountains of Naqfa thoroughly studied by the insurgents, but also they were strongly fortified so as to make advancing uphill toward the well-entrenched rebels a daunting task.

Apart from these factors, the army’s operations were marred by several drawbacks from planning to execution. In the first place, either Māngestu or the senior commanders and the Soviet advisers planned operations. The designers of those operations did not take the unsuitability of the Sahel Mountains and the strength of the insurgents into consideration. Nor did they involve the best available minds, including junior commanders who had a long acquaintance with the Sahel Mountains, in the planning process. In addition, no contingency plans were prepared in case of failure. That the command system did not allow horizontal relationships and freedom of action was another serious obstacle to the government offensive. The army failed to use the local population as a source of information about the insurgents. In contrast, the rebels assigned the local people to gather intelligence about the army, and they managed to infiltrate the military hierarchy at all levels. Since the insur-

gents had all sorts of intelligence, the army could not conceal its movements. As a result, it was seldom possible to take the insurgents by surprise or to carry out deceptive measures. If the rebels were to be significantly weakened, the government had to seal off all EPLF exits to Sudan, effectively patrol the Red Sea coast to cut off EPLF supplies, and alienate it from the local people as well as from its external supporters. Instead of trying to overwhelm the insurgents by sheer numbers and superior weaponry, the government should have deployed well-disciplined and highly committed troops specially trained in counterinsurgency operations. The Military Intelligence personnel should have vigilantly watched the army for any possible hostile infiltration, meticulously gathered vital and timely information about the insurgents, and jealously kept the army's secrets.⁹³ In the final analysis, the government's failure to capture Naqfa inexorably led to the Afabét debacle of 1988.

The fall of Afabét

Between 1982 and 1985, the army in Eritrea launched four major operations to wipe out the Eritrean insurgents. Following the failure of the last offensive to capture Naqfa in November 1985, the SRA was reorganized into four commands (Bärged, Nadāw, Mäket, and Mānter), all of which were ordered to exercise active defense on their frontlines. Nadāw was the most formidable and the strongest of the commands that formed the SRA. Put under its command were two mountain divisions and one infantry division, the famed Twenty-Ninth Zara'y Dārās Mechanized Brigade, an artillery brigade, and a tank battalion.⁹⁴

Nadāw's nerve center, as well as its ammunition and fuel depots, were based at Afabét, a small town 175 kilometers north of Asmāra. Afabét had immense strategic importance for Māngestu. It served as a bridge between the strategic town of Kārān and the main EPLF stronghold, Naqfa, and had a commanding position overlooking the rebel-held areas in the north. In addition, it was the only spot in northern Eritrea with an adequate water supply for a large army. Given Afabét's strategic importance, Māngestu did not regret putting all his eggs in one basket.⁹⁵ Some of Māngestu's critics, however, disagreed with the strategic importance of Afabét. In the eyes of Major Dawit W. Giorgis, a former administrator of Eritrea, "There was no military logic to having such a huge force with so much military hardware in one small spot."⁹⁶

Since the failure of Operation Bahrā Nāgash, the Nadāw Command was ordered to exercise constant vigilance along its defense perimeters stretching as far as Tiksi in the north to keep the insurgents at bay. Apart from small-scale aerial and overland reconnaissance missions, the Nadāw Command carried out no major counterinsurgency operations between late 1985 and 1987. In January 1987, Nadāw was given a new commander, Brigadier General Tariku Ayné. Tariku had been at odds with Major General Rāggasa Jimma, who was

now commander of the SRA, and Major General Märe'd Negussé, the chief of staff. Once transferred to Nadāw, Tariku began to reject orders from his superiors, mainly General Rāggasa and the two deputy commanders of the SRA, Major General Hussein Ahmād and Brigadier General Wubātu Šāggayé. The conflict among the senior commanders soon engulfed the division, brigade, and battalion commanders. The conflict within the Twenty-Second Mountain Infantry Division between the commander, Colonel Germa Tāfāri, and the political officer, Captain Sirak Worqnāh, was particularly serious and greatly affected the rank and file.⁹⁷

The Nadāw troops had their own grievances. They had been on the frontlines without any leave for five to nine years. It had become an open secret to every soldier that there would be no prospect of ending the war in Eritrea, which was still costing lives every day.⁹⁸ Within a span of five years alone (1982–1987), 117,195 troops of the SRA had been put out of action.⁹⁹ Therefore, Nadāw troops demanded, among other things, to be either relieved or transferred to other fronts outside Eritrea. The unrest within the Forty-Eighth, Forty-Ninth, Fiftieth, and Fifty-First Brigades of the Twenty-Second MID was particularly rife. Those soldiers who sided with the political officers declined to take orders from commanders of the division down to the squad level. Discontent and dissatisfaction had driven troops of the Twenty-Second MID to ambush and rob convoys and confiscate even the rations of their commanders. Although the situation was getting out of hand, Gebru reports that Tariku “sympathized with the troops’ grievances and supported some of their demands.”¹⁰⁰

In an attempt to curb the problem, the SRA took some disciplinary measures, ranging from demotion to execution. Among the rebellious soldiers and officers imprisoned at Tiksi, some managed to escape and defect to the EPLF. Among the defectors were people from the Operations, Military Security, and radio communication departments. Although defection meant the fall of valuable secrets into the hands of the insurgents, no attempts were made to change communication codes and operation plans.¹⁰¹

The insurgents were quick to capitalize on Nadāw’s turmoil. They decided to mount an offensive when morale was low. On December 6, 1987, the EPLF made a feint attack on the Māket Command, forcing it to retreat from the Haléba defense lines. The attack was intended to divert the attention of commanders away from the Nadāw frontlines. Two days later, the insurgents launched another offensive against the rebellious Twenty-Second MID. By striking deep into the division’s inner defenses, they disabled the command center and pushed the troops back twenty to thirty kilometers to the south from the gates of Naqfa. Such strategic heights as Dāndān and Glob came under EPLF control. All four brigades of the Twenty-Second MID were routed and displaced from their defense lines. A total of 1,388 troops were put out of action. When the division was beaten, Tariku was not near Tiksi or Afabét.

Held responsible for this setback and other wrongdoings, Tariku was executed on February 15, 1988, following Māngestu's visit to Eritrea and his face-to-face discussion with the Nadāw troops (see Appendix VII). Brigadier General Kābbādā Gashā, commander of the Māket Command, was demoted to a private and dismissed from the army without pension.¹⁰² General Rāggasa, the SRA commander, and Colonel Shāwarāga Bihonāñ, political officer of the SRA, were transferred to other posts. Colonel Gétanāh Haylé was made the new commander of Nadāw, and General Wubātu was promoted to be commander of the SRA.¹⁰³

Although some corrective measures were taken, disciplinary problems, especially insubordination, were far from over. The Fourteenth Infantry Division, which replaced the Twenty-Second MID, was equally rebellious and regarded the neighboring unit, the Nineteenth MID, as an enemy force. Both divisions were reluctant to close the gap between them. Cognizant of all these internal problems, the EPLF leaders were painstakingly preparing a plan of operation to mount the largest offensive ever on the Nadāw Command in March 1988.¹⁰⁴ The EPLF, known for concealing its intentions while accessing the top secrets of its adversary, excluded even brigade commanders from taking part in the planning of the Afabét offensive to avoid any possible leakage of information. While the plan of operation was being worked out, EPLF fighters played in soccer tournaments to make the Ethiopian commanders believe that there was no threat from the insurgents.¹⁰⁵ The EPLF commanders took all these precautions as if they were acting in accordance with the advice of the German field marshal Erwin Rommel, who said, "Concealment of intentions is of the utmost importance in order to provide surprise for one's own operations."¹⁰⁶

Although EPLF sources claim that there was a concentration of 20,000 government troops around Afabét by early 1988, Nadāw's three divisions (the Fourteenth, Nineteenth, and Twenty-First) had a total manpower of little more than that of an infantry division: 15,223, to be exact. In addition to the considerable manpower depletion, the relations between the Fourteenth and the Nineteenth Divisions were far from smooth. To make matters worse, Colonel Tāshomā Woldā Sānbāt and Colonel Admasu Mākonnen, commanders of the Fourteenth and Nineteenth Divisions, respectively, refused to take orders from the new commander of Nadāw, Colonel Gétanāh Haylé, who held the same rank. Days before the EPLF onslaught on the Tiksi front in December 1987, the Nineteenth Division was ordered to immediately close the unmanned defense lines of four to five kilometers between itself and the adjacent Fourteenth Division. The rejection of this order brought about fatal consequences.¹⁰⁷ Though discipline had nearly reached a breaking point, the SRA did not stop sending orders to the Nadāw Command to avert the danger on the horizon. Some twenty-four hours before the attack on Afabét, General Wubātu forewarned the Nadāw and Mānter Commands that the EPLF had

been bringing in weapons, probably to strike the Afabét garrison from behind and cut off its supply route. Both commanders were, therefore, ordered to reconnoiter their respective defense perimeters and report to the SRA within a couple of days. With such information at hand, it was not difficult to predict the intention of the insurgents. Before any report came out of Afabét, the EPLF mounted a three-pronged attack on the Nadāw Command on March 17, 1988.¹⁰⁸ According to the EPLF's timetable, Afabét would be captured within twenty-four hours at the earliest and forty-eight hours at the latest.¹⁰⁹

The EPLF's right flank slipped through the gap between the Fourteenth and Nineteenth Divisions, advanced behind Nadāw's lines, and sealed off the strategic pass of Māsahlit by displacing the Sādād Commando Battalion, thereby blocking the Afabét-Kārān road so as to prevent any retreat and repulse possible relief units. The left flank swept through the Red Sea coastal plains to outflank the Twenty-Ninth Mechanized Brigade at Kāmchāwa and then attack Nadāw's command center from the east. The central column mounted a frontal assault on Nadāw positions along the Amba, Ras Armas, and Rorat Mountains. The Nadāw Command received reports of an EPLF offensive on all fronts at 0515 hours.¹¹⁰ Although EPLF fighters on the right and central fronts proceeded according to plan, they faced stiff resistance on the left flank from the Twenty-Ninth Mechanized Brigade. In the words of Michela Wrong, "For 16 hours, the surprised Ethiopians resisted with extraordinary tenacity."¹¹¹ As the EPLF gained the upper hand, the SRA decided to pull back the Mechanized Brigade from Kāmchāwa and send reinforcements to Afabét. As troops began to fall back to Afabét, the insurgents tried in vain to block them at Moga'e River. They hurried on the heels of the mechanized forces to trap them at Ad Shārum, a narrow pass north of Afabét. The mechanized convoy heading to Afabét consisted of seventy tanks, APCs, and trucks. As the convoy struggled to pass through the narrow pass, a shell fired from an EPLF tank hit one of the leading trucks. All other trucks, tanks, and APCs were blocked. The Nadāw troops had to act swiftly to prevent the whole convoy from falling into EPLF hands. They began to destroy their own weapons with hand grenades. Government jet fighters appeared in the skies to complete the destruction.¹¹²

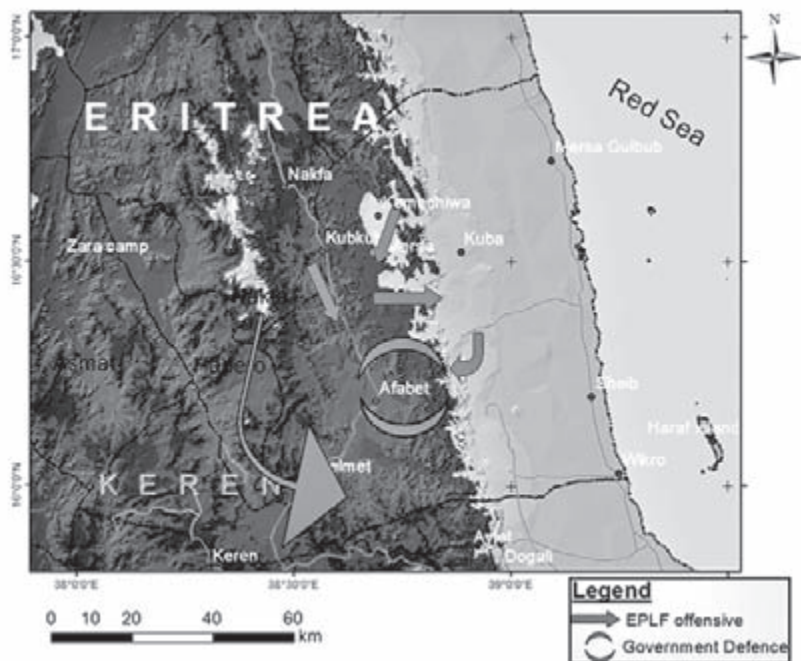
Since the Naqfa-Afabét road was now blocked at Ad Shārum by destroyed tanks and trucks, the EPLF mechanized units had to move back to Kāmchāwa. From there, they rushed to the east and then moved southward, parallel to the Red Sea coast, before turning west to Afabét.¹¹³ As the insurgents were racing against time to storm the Nadāw command center at Afabét, the SRA rushed the Sixteenth Sānteq Mechanized Brigade and the Thirty-Eighth and Thirty-Ninth Mountain Infantry Brigades to the Māsahlit pass from Aqordat, Mālābso, and Wa'ezāger, respectively, in an attempt to reopen the Kārān-Afabét road. But the two EPLF brigades refused to be driven out of the strategic pass. Then, on March 18, the SRA sent the Seventy-Eighth and Eighty-Second

Brigades of the Fifteenth Infantry (Näbro) Division to Kärän from Asmära. Although the insurgents tried to delay their advance by ambushing them at Adi Täkläzan, the two brigades reached Kärän with minor damage. From there, 650 troops from the two brigades were flown by helicopter to Afabét.¹¹⁴

As the Nadāw troops in the outer defense lines retreated to Afabét, the EPLF's central column positioned itself against the Twenty-First MID to storm the command center. Fearing that the Nadāw Command might not be able to coordinate the ill-disciplined and demoralized soldiers, General Wubātu moved to Afabét and took command of the fighting. Troops in the inner lines of trenches fought heroically for two days without letting up. Although the situation was getting worse at an alarming speed, furious fighting continued in the third day. While the troops east of the town were still holding their positions, the insurgents managed to force their way into the outskirts of the town. At this critical moment, many soldiers retreated in the direction of Kärän. Commanders tried to regroup, but to no avail. Following furious hand-to-hand fighting, the rebels controlled the command center. Despite the storming of the command and control center, the rear guard continued to fight until the evening of March 19. All resistance was finally broken at 0730 hours. Although the command blew up its own headquarters before falling into EPLF hands, it failed to do the same to its ammunition depot.¹¹⁵ Therefore, the insurgents captured, in the words of Mängestu, "a mountain of ammunition."¹¹⁶ In addition, fifty tanks, a number of long-range artillery pieces, and multiple rocket launchers, antiaircraft guns, and military vehicles fell into EPLF hands.¹¹⁷ According to the Operations Department of the MOND, 12,116 troops were put out of action: 2,995 were killed, 6,038 were wounded, and 3,083 went missing in action. The rest are reported to have reached safety.¹¹⁸

The fall of Afabét into EPLF hands was a turning point in the war in Eritrea and a huge victory for the insurgents. However, given the grave internal crisis that had been rocking the Nadāw Command, its destruction within three days of fighting may not be that surprising. A committee formed to investigate the main reasons for the destruction of the Nadāw Command listed several factors, including conflict and rivalry among commanders, insubordination, corruption, incompetence, and "lack of a reliable reserve force."¹¹⁹ But General Wubātu, then the commander of the SRA, dismissed the last point as one of the reasons for defeat. According to him, by the time the EPLF launched its offensive to take Afabét, the 102nd Airborne Division sat idle, stationed in Asmära, but he could not deploy the division to Afabét without getting the go-ahead from his superiors.¹²⁰ In the eyes of a former EPLF fighter, the Afabét victory was the result of EPLF's sophistication and ingenuity.¹²¹ Although EPLF's skillful use of intelligence and good military leadership for its all-out offensive contributed a great deal to its capture of Afabét, the fundamental reasons for the destruction of the Nadāw Command should be sought in the command's internal crisis.

Map 8. The Battle of Afabét.



Shocked by the destruction of the Nadāw Command, the government pulled its troops out of Bārēntu, Aqordat, Tāsānāy, Ali Gidār, and Haykota within the next two weeks, leaving western and northern Eritrea to the EPLF.¹²² Consequently, the Second Mechanized Division, the Twenty-Third Infantry Division, and the Sānteq Mechanized Brigade were concentrated around Kārān in an attempt to reopen the Kārān-Afabēt road. What was disheartening was the fate of the Kunama, an ethnic minority living in and around Bārēntu. Since 1977, the Kunama had always been on the side of the army and had never supported the insurgents. When Bārēntu was evacuated, they had to move with the army all the way to Kārān for fear of reprisals by the EPLF.¹²³

Weeks after the destruction of the Nadāw Command, the government came to believe that it was still possible to regain Afabēt. Accordingly, in consultation with the Soviet military advisers, a plan of operation to retake Afabēt was prepared in absolute secrecy. Even the senior commanders of the SRA were not informed, probably to prevent information leakage. Since the Kārān-Afabēt road was highly fortified, the 102nd Airborne Division was to march to the north along the sandy plains parallel to the Red Sea coast in the direction of She'eb. Likewise, the Ninth Division was moved from the

Ogaden to Meşewa via Assäb. About ninety tanks and armored vehicles were deployed to capture Afabét from the east. By the time they reached Ma'mido, the troops were completely exhausted, and many had already died due to dehydration and sunstroke. Water became scarce. The shortage was so critical that a soldier killed a lieutenant for a few liters of water. Government troops thus became easy prey to the insurgents. The EPLF's four divisions were arrayed against the Airborne Division and the supporting units. The insurgents ambushed Brigadier General Tämäsgän Gämächu, commander of the Airborne Division; some said he committed suicide. The remaining troops were finally ordered to fall back to Asmära after losing many of their comrades in the sands of Ma'mido.¹²⁴

Soon after the fall of Afabét, the government moved the widely esteemed Third (Lion) Division from Tigray to Kärän to reinforce the army there. Using this opportunity to the best advantage, the TPLF mounted a series of offensives and controlled Adwa, Aksum, Säläkläka, and Enda Sellasé between March 28 and 31, 1988. When Enda Sellasé fell into TPLF hands, 2,776 troops of the Seventeenth Division and their commander, Brigadier General Ar'aya Zär'ay, were able to make their way to Gondär.¹²⁵

Frustrated by the worsening situation unfolding in the region, Brigadier General Addis Agellachäw, commander of the Tigray Command, sent a message full of despair to the defense minister. Part of the message reads:

There are several indications that the situation [in Tigray] is on the verge of getting out of control. The swift movement of the enemy is making intelligence gathering and decision making a difficult exercise. The enemy's intricate intelligence network, the defection of the people's militia to the rebels, the increasing number of enemy collaborators in towns and rural areas and the rebels' psychological warfare have eroded the fighting spirit of the army . . . The separate army units we had stationed at various places could not even defend themselves and a considerable number of troops and weapons are being destroyed and falling into enemy hands . . . Even those army units which had been great fighters are being easily neutralized, missing and captured by the enemy.¹²⁶

The Seventeenth Division, called Tärb (Wasp), was, for instance, known for its fighting capability and bravery. But in March 1988, the Tärb and the Sixteenth Divisions lost to the TPLF nine T-55 tanks, sixty-six artillery pieces, nine ZU-23 anti-aircraft guns, sixteen military vehicles, and a considerable number of small arms.¹²⁷

After a two-month rehabilitation and preparation, the insurgents were ready to strike the army's southern sectors. Accordingly, in collaboration with the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), the TPLF moved

from Säqota and captured the town of Koräm on May 25, 1988, following a five-hour fight. On the same day, other TPLF units captured the strategic mountain of Amba Alagé. The army at Maychäw was completely cut off. Its supply routes were blocked at Amba Alagé and at Gera Kasso, another strategic mountain between Koräm and Allamata. On May 27, 1988, a joint TPLF–EPDM force attacked the First Division headquarters and the 117th Brigade based at Maychäw. The army's defenses were overrun, and the division commander, Colonel Haylu G. Yohannes, was captured after courageously fighting like a common soldier. The army lost three T-55 tanks, eleven artillery, twelve armored vehicles, sixty-three other vehicles, and four Zu-23 anti-aircraft guns. The insurgents controlled the area for two weeks until they could move all captured property to a place of safety. Nonetheless, within a matter of five days (between June 10 and 15, 1988), the army recaptured Koräm, Maychäw, and Amba Alagé.¹²⁸

The Third Revolutionary Army (TRA)

In an attempt to reverse the worsening military situation in Eritrea and Tigray, the government had already taken a series of measures. On April 9, 1988, the Tigray Command (renamed the 604th Corps), the North-Eastern Command (now the 605th Corps), and the North-Western Command (the 603rd Corps) were brought together to form the Third Revolutionary Army (TRA). The newly formed TRA had under its command 75,493 troops, of whom regulars formed 35 percent, the remaining 65 percent being national servicemen and people's militia. Following the formation of the TRA, its component units—the 603rd, 604th, and 605th Corps—were assigned to carry out counterinsurgency operations in Gondär, Tigray, and Wollo, respectively.¹²⁹

The establishment of the TRA was followed by the declaration of a state of emergency on May 14, 1988, in Eritrea and Tigray. Accordingly, Lieutenant General Täsfayé G. Kidan and Captain Läggäsä Asfaw, both politburo members of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE), were made overall administrators of Eritrea and Tigray, respectively, and given sweeping power.¹³⁰

Despite the formation of the TRA, the declaration of the state of emergency, and the assignment of two loyal party officials as overall administrators, the government seemed less secure. The government calculated that by signing a peace accord with Somalia, it would be possible to redeploy troops from the Ogadén to the northern front. To that end, the Ethiopian government initiated peace talks with Mogadishu in early 1988, and the effort bore fruit soon afterward. Ethiopia and Somalia agreed to pull back their forces fifteen kilometers from the common border as a first step toward a cessation of hostilities. The agreement was signed on May 16, 1988, in Hargeisa, Somalia, by Major General Mäsfen G. Qal, the Ethiopian deputy defense minister, and Brigadier General Mohammed Said Hersi, also known as General Mor-

gan, the Somali commander of the Twenty-Sixth Command. As expected, the agreement enabled the Ethiopian government to transfer some army units from the Ogađen to the northern front.¹³¹

Operation Adwa

Some two months after its formation, the TRA was ordered to launch a huge campaign named Operation Adwa. The objective of Operation Adwa was to wipe out insurgents in Gondär and Tigray, and it was to be carried out in four phases between June 20 and August 3, 1988. The theater of operation extended from the Dässé-Mäqälé road in the east to the Gondär-Humära road in the west. Units of the 603rd Corps (that is, the Seventh Division and the Fifteenth, Seventeenth, Nineteenth, Thirty-Third, 114th, 115th, and 136th Brigades) were assigned to destroy the main TPLF base areas in northern Gondär. Similarly, the 604th Corps, coordinating the Fourth, Ninth, and Sixteenth Infantry and 103rd Commando Divisions, was expected to annihilate the insurgents in Tigray. The 605th Corps, consisting of the First Infantry Division and the First, Second, Sixteenth, 100th, 117th, 140th, and 142nd Brigades, was given a less demanding task: to safeguard Woldya, Alälé Sulula, Qobbo, Koräm, Maychäw, and Amba Alagé by stationing a brigade at each town.¹³²

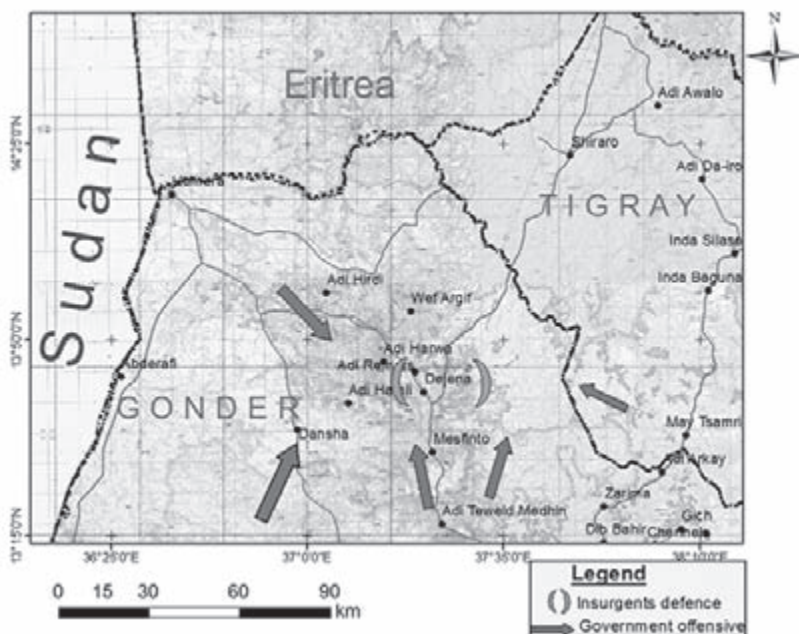
In the first phase of Operation Adwa, only the 604th Corps met stiff resistance from the TPLF. The Fourth and Ninth Divisions were assigned to open up the Mäqälé-Adigrat and Mäqälé-Dässé roads before taking control of Hagärä Sälam and Abiy Addi. The two divisions controlled Hagärä Sälam and Abiy Addi according to plan between June 21 and 24, 1988. During the first phase of the operation, 1,071 government troops were put out of action, while the TPLF casualties were reported to be 1,714.¹³³

The second phase of Operation Adwa was launched following the completion of the first phase. At this stage, the Seventh Division and its supporting brigades under the 603rd Corps had to converge on Dansha from four directions: Humära, Mätämma, Tekel Dengay, and Däbarq. On their way, these army units routed the insurgents in Bä'akar, Gerar Weha, Gechäw, Sanja, Addi Arqay, and Dansha. While the Seventeenth Brigade from Däbarq captured Addi Arqay on June 21, 1988, other units of the 603rd Corps from Mätämma, Humära, and Tekel Dengay advanced to Dansha. The march on Dansha was not, however, without problems. Although other units converged on Dansha according to schedule, the Angäräb River hampered the movement of those troops from Tekel Dengay and Mätämma. When they finally entered Dansha on June 28, the soldiers were completely exhausted. Even then, they were ordered to keep marching to Kaza and Däjäna along with other units. Brigadier General Haylu Bäräwaq, commander of the 603rd Corps, was instructed by his superiors to personally lead the third phase of the

operation instead of delegating his power to his deputy, Brigadier General As-säfa Mosisa. The third phase of Operation Adwa aimed at storming the main TPLF base areas in Kaza and Däjäna.¹³⁴

The TPLF had already established training camps near the banks of the Kaza and Angäräb Rivers. Its command center, arms depot, hospital, and radio station were at Däjäna in the Tach (Lower) Armacheho district of Wogära *Awrajjä*. The TPLF also had farms in the fertile plains of Däjäna, where it grew grain and cash crops for its own consumption and for export to Sudan. Since the people of Tach Armacheho were reported to be fond of rifles and the government exercised little control over the district, the locality was, therefore, an ideal base area for insurgents. It is no wonder that the TPLF chose the district as its main base area.¹³⁵

Map 9. The government attempt to encircle the TPLF base areas in Dansha, Kaza, and Däjäna during Operation Adwa III, July 1988.



The convergence of government troops on Dansha, a town along the Gondär-Humära road not far from Däjäna, was thus a real threat to the TPLF insurgents. By the time the government troops resumed their advance to the main base areas in early July, the senior political and military leaders of the TPLF were at Däjäna. Hayyälom Ar'aya, one of the TPLF commanders, recalled: "As we heard the advance of the 603rd Corps from Dansha to Däjäna,

we realized that a decisive engagement which would put a severe test to our survival was going to take place. Losing Dājāna meant going back to square one.”¹³⁶ By way of subverting the impending disaster, the TPLF had not only to deploy noncombatants known as *keftat* (sections) but also to swiftly move most of its fighters from Tigray to Dājāna. In doing so, it intended to defend its base areas around Kaza and Dājāna in northern Gondär.¹³⁷

On the other hand, the transfer of TPLF fighters from Tigray to northern Gondär helped the 604th Corps to capture several towns fairly quickly. According to the plans of Operation Adwa, the army was expected to take control of only May Qenātal (south of Adwa) and Sānqata (south of Adigrat) in the second phase. But the withdrawal of the insurgents enabled the Fourth and Ninth Divisions to control May Qenātal, Adwa, Aksum, and Enda Sellaśé, while the Sixteenth Division captured Sānqata, Adigrat, and Enticho between June 27 and 30, 1988. However, while opening up the Adigrat-Enda Sellaśé road, the 604th Corps failed to garrison the towns of Adwa and Aksum. Instead, it concentrated its forces around Enda Sellaśé, which brought about disastrous consequences.¹³⁸

Once the 604th Corps controlled all the main towns in Tigray, it was expected to send the Fourth and Ninth Divisions from Sheré to Dājāna so as to encircle and finally annihilate the insurgents in collaboration with the 603rd Corps. If units of 604th Corps had arrived in time, the rebels would have been in real danger. On their part, the troops of the 603rd Corps captured the TPLF training center at Kaza and entered Dājāna in early July 1988, despite a shortage of tanks and artillery. They blocked the main route connecting the TPLF command center in Dājāna with western Tigray.¹³⁹

As units of the 603rd Corps surged through TPLF base areas toward the main command center, the insurgents were thrown into panic. Government forces were close to a decisive victory. At this critical moment, when the very survival of the TPLF was at stake, the Fourth and Ninth Divisions of the 604th Corps, which were expected to open the way for a final pincer operation, had not yet crossed the Tākāzé River. That delay was mainly due to the incompetence and lack of prudence on the part of the commanders. Since they planned the operation during the rainy season, muddy roads and rivers immobilized the tanks and artillery. The government troops could not cover the enormous distance in time. This considerable delay contributed greatly to the undoing of the campaign. To make matters worse, jet fighters taking off from Baher Dar could not bomb TPLF positions, and helicopters could not evacuate wounded troops because of bad weather. Capitalizing on such weaknesses, the TPLF concentrated its fighters and managed to dislodge government forces first from Dājāna and then from Dansha in a fierce counter-offensive. On July 11, 1988, government forces on the Dansha front were in disarray. While General Haylu and most of his troops retreated to Humära, others ended up in Gondär.¹⁴⁰

The 604th Corps soon ordered the Fourth and Ninth Divisions to return immediately to Sheré before the insurgents turned against them after routing the 603rd Corps. Although the 603rd Corps had nearly achieved its goal, the third phase of Operation Adwa finally fizzled out. Had there been good coordination between the 603rd and 604th Corps and effective military leadership, the army could have scored a major victory.¹⁴¹ On the Dansha-Dājāna front alone, a total of 4,226 government troops were put out of action, of whom 1,652 were killed, 1,406 were wounded, and 1,168 went missing in action.¹⁴² Obviously, planning such a huge operation to be launched during the rainy season betrays not only ignorance of military strategy but also a clear disregard for the lives of government troops. Some regard it as one of several acts of sabotage committed by the senior commanders preparing to stage a coup. Others view it as the result of shortsightedness on the part of Captain Lāggāsä Asfaw and the TRA commander, Major General Mulatu Nāgash.¹⁴³

The setback on the Dansha-Dājāna front did not deter the TRA from going ahead with the last phase of Operation Adwa. In this phase, the 604th Corps deployed the Fourth, Ninth, and Sixteenth Divisions (a total of twelve brigades) to Addi Da'ero, Addi Guzām, Addi Hagāray, and Sheraro to destroy the insurgents based in those areas. Leaving behind three brigades to safeguard army headquarters and supply routes, the Fourth, Ninth, and Sixteenth Divisions set out from Enda Sellasé to Addi Da'ero on July 29, 1988.¹⁴⁴ Although initial advances were reportedly good, poor logistics exposed troops to starvation. The situation was exacerbated by heavy floods and malaria. As two brigades of the Sixteenth Division (the Twenty-Second and 120th) moved to Addi Hagāray on August 4, 1988, they were attacked and scattered by a larger TPLF force. Once it had secured its base areas in northern Gondār with heavy losses, the TPLF concentrated its forces around Addi Hagāray to disrupt the last phase of Operation Adwa. Attempts to reinforce and regroup failed due to bad weather and harassment by insurgents. The rebels then closed the line of retreat and encircled the Twenty-Second and 120th Brigades of the Sixteenth Division and the 103rd Brigade of the Ninth Division. The three brigades suffered heavy casualties. The remaining troops were ordered to fall back to Enda Sellasé.¹⁴⁵

Operation Aksum

Following the end of Operation Adwa, there began a period of inactivity until the TPLF captured Rama, a town between Adwa and the Mārāb River, on September 29, 1988. The supply route of the 604th Corps from Asmāra was thus cut off.¹⁴⁶ The fall of Rama into TPLF hands prompted the government to work out a new plan of operation named Operation Aksum. The overall objective of the operation was to reopen the Enda Sellasé-Asmāra road so as

to keep supplies coming in from Asmāra. To closely coordinate the operation, the TRA moved its advance headquarters from Mäqälé to Enda Sellasé.¹⁴⁷

Although experiences were disappointing with regard to military coordination, the SRA was assigned to deploy an infantry division along the Rama-Adwa route to support the TRA. Unfortunately, however, the overall administrator of Eritrea, General Täsfayé G. Kidan, was at odds with both Captain Läggäsä Asfaw and General Mulatu Nägash. General Täsfayé did not seem to be interested in seeing Operation Aksum succeed.¹⁴⁸

After nearly a five-month rehabilitation, phase one of Operation Aksum began with the deployment of the Tenth Division from the SRA to Rama and the Ninth and Sixteenth Divisions from the TRA to Chella, north of Säläkläka. Setting out from Säläkläka and Enda Sellasé, respectively, the Ninth and Sixteenth Divisions were expected to meet at Chella and mount a joint operation against the insurgents. However, there was a ten- to fifteen-kilometer gap between the two divisions, and that helped the insurgents to attack both divisions separately. After beating and scattering the Sixteenth Division, the rebels concentrated their forces against the Ninth Division. Both divisions suffered heavy losses before returning to Enda Sellasé and Säläkläka. Soon afterward, the TRA transferred the 103rd Commando Division from Mäqälé to reinforce the Fourth Division at Enda Sellasé.¹⁴⁹ Likewise, the Seventeenth Division from Gondär and the Sixth and the Thirtieth Mechanized Brigades from Wollo were moved to Mäqälé. The withdrawal of the Seventeenth Division made the Gondär-Däbarq line vulnerable to TPLF onslaught. As a result, the insurgents captured the towns of Däbarq and Dabat on February 3, 1989.¹⁵⁰

Despite the failure of Operation Aksum I, the TRA believed that there was still a chance to control Aksum and Adwa and reopen the Adwa-Asmāra route. The TRA thus went ahead with the second phase of Operation Aksum. According to the plan of Operation Aksum II, the Sixteenth Division would control the Säläkläka, Aqab Sä'at, Endaba Beruk, and May Brazio areas. Then, the 103rd Commando Division would sweep through the Säläkläka-Aksum road to pave the way for the Ninth Division, which could advance to Adwa. The Fourth Division would be kept at Enda Sellasé to safeguard supply depots and army headquarters. Based on wrong combat intelligence, the 604th Corps came to believe that the TPLF had sent some of its units to Däbarq and Dabat. As a result, it deployed only three divisions along the Säläkläka-Aksum front. But the fact was that five TPLF divisions were arrayed against the three divisions of the 604th Corps.¹⁵¹

On February 8, 1989, the 103rd Commando Division set out from Säläkläka and advanced to Aksum. As the division was on its way to Aksum, the insurgents launched an attack on February 10, 1989, at Aqab Sä'at against the Twenty-Second Brigade of the Sixteenth Division and the Seventy-Fifth Brigade of the Ninth Division. Attempts to rescue the two brigades failed.¹⁵² As

the insurgents threatened to cut the Säläkläka-Aksum road, the four brigades of the 103rd Commando Division were ordered to return without delay to Enda Sellasé. One brigade of the Ninth Division was assigned to safeguard the road for the safe return of the Commando Division. While advancing to Aksum, the 1035th Commando Brigade was the vanguard unit. Colonel Gétahun W. Giorgis, commander of the 103rd Commando Division, was leading the vanguard brigade. When ordered to fall back, the 1035th Brigade became the last to return. The brigade that had been assigned to patrol the road also withdrew along with the first three commando brigades. The 1035th Brigade was left with no rear guard. It was soon isolated and attacked by the insurgents. The brigade sustained heavy losses. Out of some 1,200 men, only about 450 troops returned to Enda Sellasé. The division commander narrowly escaped a hand grenade attack. In the final analysis, Operation Aksum II ended in failure.¹⁵³

The Sheré disaster

Following the failure of the Aksum operations, the 604th Corps concentrated its four divisions around Enda Sellasé and Säläkläka. The Fourth Division was entrusted to defend Enda Sellasé and the surrounding hills, including the strategic Mount Qoyaşa. The Sixteenth Division positioned itself at Säläkläka. While the Ninth Division was stationed at Afgahgah, the 103rd Commando Division was put as a reserve force for the Fourth Division. Through its intelligence sources, the TPLF had already learned that the TRA would soon withdraw troops from Säläkläka to concentrate its forces around Enda Sellasé. Just before the evacuation of Säläkläka, the insurgents decided to block the strategic pass of Afgahgah between the two towns. Then on February 15, 1989, they mounted a dawn attack on government positions at Säläkläka. In the meantime, they slipped through a gap and advanced to Afgahgah. By displacing the small force stationed there, the rebels captured the Afgahgah pass. That takeover was followed by the fall of Mount Qoyaşa into TPLF hands. The insurgents then positioned artillery at Qoyaşa, a mountain with a commanding position over the surrounding areas. Government positions at Säläkläka and Enda Sellasé came under a barrage of artillery fire from Mount Qoyaşa. The Enda Sellasé airport became one of the main targets of the insurgents' artillery. Heavy fighting took place at Afgahgah as government troops tried to force their way to Enda Sellasé. Many troops managed to break through the pass after suffering heavy casualties, just before the fall of Säläkläka into TPLF hands. The Ninth and Sixteenth Divisions suffered heavy losses. The 103rd Commando Division tried in vain to dislodge the insurgents from Mount Qoyaşa and Afgahgah.¹⁵⁴

The next objective of the insurgents was to destroy the 604th Corps altogether and capture Enda Sellasé. Sometime earlier, the TPLF leaders had

been advised by the EPLF leadership not to risk an attack on the 604th Corps for fear of a devastating counteroffensive. For the EPLF men, to move against the coming “flood” (that is, the 604th Corps) would be suicidal. In contrast, the TPLF viewed the army in general and the 604th Corps in particular as a weak opponent that might collapse if pushed vigorously. As a result, the TPLF was not ready to take heed of EPLF’s advice. Instead, emboldened by the strategic initiative it had already seized, it went ahead with its plan of annihilating the government forces at Enda Sellasé.¹⁵⁵ To that end, the TPLF amassed five divisions: Ag’azi, Alula, Awrora, Qäy Kokäb, and Yäkatit.¹⁵⁶ According to Gebru, the number of divisions was much higher: “The TPLF had assembled more than 40,000 consisting of seven regular divisions, about 10,000 *Zobawi* or zonal fighters, more than 5,000 people’s militia . . .”¹⁵⁷ The TPLF forces were further reinforced by an EPLF mechanized brigade, which arrived for critical support with twelve tanks, eight artillery pieces, and about a dozen ZU-23 anti-aircraft guns.¹⁵⁸

On the government side, however, there was alarming manpower depletion. On the day of the final battle, the TRA commander expressed his frustration by notifying the high command that the total manpower of the Ninth, Sixteenth, and 103rd Divisions had dwindled to 7,300, much lower than that of an infantry division. The 604th Corps, therefore, had only around 12,000 troops, four to five times less than that of the TPLF fighters. Only the Fourth Division, which had avoided the brunt of earlier engagements, was hoped to put up stiff resistance against the insurgents.¹⁵⁹

Just before the final battle, the TPLF is said to have smuggled fighters and arms into Enda Sellasé in various guises. Such infiltration helped the insurgents to confuse government troops and create havoc by fighting from within.¹⁶⁰

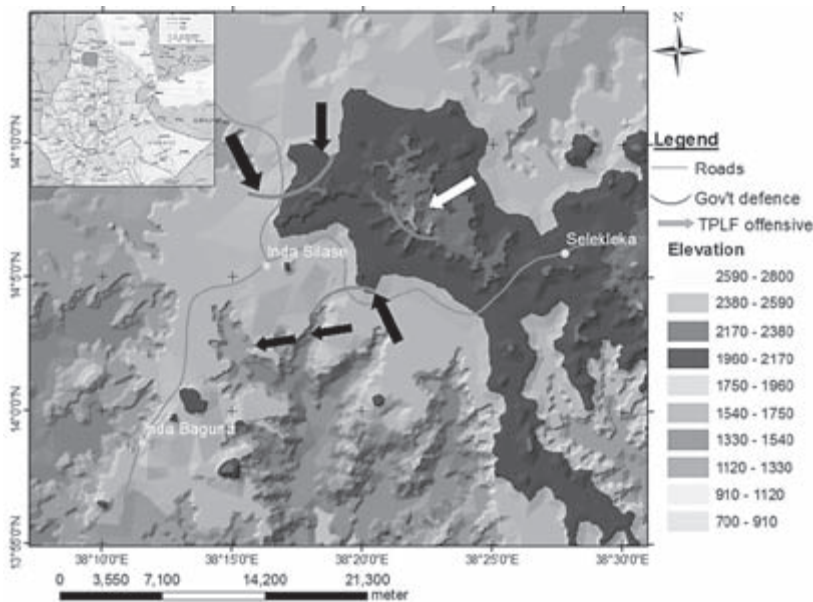
On February 18, 1989, at 0200 hours, the insurgents launched a close-in offensive against the 604th Corps from the south, north, and northeast. The main attack came from the direction of Addi Kokäb, Enda Giorgis (north), and Mount Qoyaşa (northeast of Enda Sellasé). As anticipated, the Fourth Division fought staunchly and defended its position. Similarly, the tank, artillery, and anti-aircraft units of the 604th Corps fought tenaciously and repulsed the EPLF mechanized brigade. That mechanized brigade was not seen in battle again until the fall of Enda Sellasé into TPLF hands and never played a decisive role.¹⁶¹

At this critical moment, General Mulatu delegated his command to Brigadier General Haylu Käbbädä, the head of the TRA’s operations, and left for Mäqälé at 1230 hours promising to send reinforcements. Contrary to his promise, the commander failed to dispatch reinforcements. Nor was he able to maintain radio communication with the 604th Corps command. As the Fourth Division withstood the TPLF offensive, the insurgents turned against its reserve force, the 103rd Commando Division. The Commando Division

Figure 1. The strategic hills of Enda Giorgis, just outside Enda Sellasé.
Photo by the author



Map 10. The Battle of Sheré.



was forced to retreat to the airport, exposing the Fourth Division's rear defenses. Soon, the demoralized troops of the Ninth and Sixteenth Divisions, who had sustained heavy losses in earlier engagements, backed away, leaving the Fourth Division exposed. Even then, the division continued fighting, unshaken by the retreat of friendly units and by the concentration of fire from the insurgents. Those based at Enda Giorgis, especially, fought courageously to the last hour.¹⁶²

The battle was finally lost when the insurgents controlled the strategic hill of Enda Kántiba (nicknamed "Gobo Atarit," that is, Hill of Prostitutes) on the southern outskirts of the town. Then, all government troops retreated to the airport.

Figure 2. Enda Kántiba (Gobo Atarit) hill, Enda Sellasé.

Photo by the author



All attempts to turn the panic-stricken troops into a cohesive and effective combat force failed. The insurgents had already rushed to Endabaguna to block the escape route to Gondär, learning from a grave mistake committed a year earlier. They captured Enda Sellasé on February 19 at 1900 hours. The fall of the town turned out to be a decisive victory for the TPLF and the second largest blow to the government after the Afabét disaster. Brigadier General Addis Agellachäw, commander of the 604th Corps, and Brigadier General Haylu Käbbädä died during the retreat, and Brigadier General Bärätta Gämoraw, deputy commander of the TRA, was captured. Including the nearly 3,000 government troops who managed to reach Gondär by April 16, 1989, a total of about 6,000 soldiers are believed to have made their way to safety. At the same time, 2,505 troops fell into TPLF hands. Shocked by

**Figure 3. Enda Sellasé viewed from Enda Giorgis.
Enda Kāntiba is seen in the background.**

Photo by the author



**Figure 4. Enda Sellasé viewed from Enda Kāntiba.
Enda Giorgis is seen in the background.**

Photo by the author



the destruction of the 604th Corps, the government withdrew its forces from Mäqälé on February 27, 1989.¹⁶³

Following the dramatic loss of Sheré, an ad hoc committee composed of three officers was formed to investigate the causes for the destruction of the 604th Corps. The committee came up with a seventy-three-page report focusing on the weaknesses of the corps and the strengths of the insurgents. Among other things, it came to the conclusion that 65 percent of the TRA's troops were poorly trained and lacked commitment. The committee also questioned the competence of commanders. It found the profile of most of the commanders to be below standard. The incompetence of the combat intelligence department of the TRA and its defectiveness in gathering intelligence was another important finding of the ad hoc committee. The erosion of the fighting spirit of government troops by TPLF propaganda and the army's failure to win the support of the local people were also mentioned in the committee's report.¹⁶⁴

A closer look at the key findings of the committee's report reveals an honest assessment of factors that led to the dramatic collapse of the 604th Corps. It also sheds light on the terrible failures of the preceding operations. Interestingly, when interviewed in 2003, two of the committee members corroborated what they had found fourteen years earlier.¹⁶⁵ The committee, however, failed to implicate the two overall administrators and the commander of the TRA probably due to fear of antagonizing them. Mängestu may be partly right in attributing the Sheré military disaster to the sabotage and incompetence of the SRA and TRA commanders. According to him, General Täsfayé G. Kidan was at loggerheads with both Captain Läggäsä Asfaw and General Mulatu Nägash. During Operation Aksum I, Täsfayé withdrew the Tenth Division from the Rama front without informing either Läggäsä or Mulatu "to embarrass both of them through defeat, ignoring the fact that such a disaster would cost so many Ethiopian lives."¹⁶⁶ Within the TRA, relations among commanders and officials were far from cordial. For instance, General Mulatu was not on good terms with Captain Läggäsä. In fact, Mulatu was to blame for abandoning the 604th Corps at a critical moment. But Mängestu so far never admitted that it was he who assigned all such officials and commanders to key positions. He did not even admit that the evacuation of Mäqälé was a major strategic blunder. He claimed that the idea of evacuating Mäqälé was presented to him by those senior commanders who had been involved in the planning of the 1989 coup attempt. When he refused to be persuaded, they sent Soviet military advisers to put pressure on him.¹⁶⁷ In any case, Mängestu himself is to blame for that fateful decision.

Worsening military reverses

Two and half months after the evacuation of Mäqälé, a group of senior commanders of the armed forces attempted a coup just after Mängestu's departure

for an official visit to East Germany. Since it was poorly planned and badly coordinated, it was soon aborted. It led to the execution of several generals in Asmāra and Addis Ababa.¹⁶⁸

In the wake of the abortive coup, Māngestu reshuffled commanders of the armed forces. The appointment of new commanders did not, however, reverse the worsening military situation in the northern theater. On the contrary, following the withdrawal of government forces from Māqälé, the various army units were to be repositioned. Accordingly, the TRA transferred its main headquarters to Tita, ten kilometers north of Dässé. Likewise, the 605th Corps had Tita as its headquarters. The advance headquarters of the TRA and the 605th Corps were also moved to Qobbo and Allamata, respectively. Once it set up its headquarters, the TRA garrisoned all the main towns between Woldya and Amba Alagé. The First, Seventeenth, and Twenty-Seventh Infantry Divisions were respectively stationed at Maychāw, Korām, and Allamata, and the Sixth Mechanized Brigade was based at Qobbo.¹⁶⁹

On their part, the insurgents were again ready to mount a series of offensives against government forces. The TPLF began to coordinate its military operations with the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) and created an alliance called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in May 1989. After nearly six months of rehabilitation and consolidation, the EPRDF began its offensive on August 29, 1989, by attacking government positions stretching from Maychāw in the north to Doro Geber (a small town between Qobbo and Woldya) in the south. According to the EPRDF's plan of operation named Sālam bā Tegel (Peace Through Struggle), the whole theater was divided into two sectors. The northern sector, stretching from Gera Kasso (a strategic mountain just outside Allamata) to Maychāw, was to be attacked by a force under the command of Hayyālom Ar'aya. The second force, led by Samora Yānus, was to set out from Wajerat, near Māqälé, make a wide detour, and march through the Afar lowlands before reaching Doro Geber to cut off the army from behind. The whole operation was to be coordinated by one of TPLF's chief strategists, Ṣadqan G. Tānsay.¹⁷⁰

Worried by the looming disaster, Lieutenant General Addis Tādla, the new chief of staff, radioed the deputy commander of the TRA, Brigadier General Mārdasa Lélisa, on August 31 and September 1, 1989, warning that the First and Seventeenth Divisions should fight to the last man and hold their positions at Maychāw and Korām at any cost. The new TRA commander, Major General Asrat Berru, was also ordered to immediately move to the war front and coordinate operations instead of sending messages from Addis Ababa. Contrary to the strict orders given by the chief of staff, the First and Seventeenth Divisions were displaced from Maychāw and Korām, respectively, and were forced to retreat to Allamata.¹⁷¹

The area between Woldya and Allamata now became the new theater of operations. While fighting was going on around Mount Gera Kasso and Alla-

mata, the insurgents bypassed government positions and blocked the Qobbo-Woldya road at Doro Geber. At the same time, another small EPRDF force cut off the Allamata-Qobbo road at a strategic pass called Chubé Bär. At this point, the army was given orders to destroy its supply depot at Allamata and quickly retreat to Qobbo. The TRA made no attempt to evacuate the wounded by trucks or helicopters. Even those soldiers who were seriously wounded were left to their own devices. Disheartened by the suffering of unattended wounded troops, a junior officer who witnessed the incident lamented, "One thing which never vanishes from my memory is the desperate attempt of the wounded soldiers to escape by hobbling or crawling."¹⁷²

The ambushing insurgents at Chubé Bär halted the army's retreat to Qobbo. The army shelled the rebels' hideouts but failed to dislodge the ambushers. Many troops died while trying to break through the pass. Brigadier General Telahun Argaw, commander of the 605th Corps, forced his way with a tank. By the time he arrived at Qobbo, the town was inundated with demoralized soldiers.¹⁷³

The TRA and the 605th Corps advance headquarters tried to regroup the available troops at Qobbo. Soon, the insurgents began their assault on government positions at Qobbo. According to the coordinator of the whole operation, the EPRDF deployed no heavy weapons in that operation. All heavy artillery and tanks captured in earlier operations were being used for training a mechanized unit in Tigray.¹⁷⁴ While heavy fighting was going on, helicopters and jet fighters bombarded insurgent positions and gave air support to the army. Between August 31 and September 8, 1989, several helicopters and jet fighters made 248 sorties from Baher Dar, Däbrä Zäyet, Diré Dawa, and Kombolcha airfields to bomb EPRDF positions around Qobbo. During the operation, four helicopters, one MiG-21 fighter jet, and one MiG-23 fighter jet were hit by insurgent fire but managed to land safely.¹⁷⁵

In spite of sustained aerial support, the army could not hold its defensive positions. Some units even disobeyed orders and began to retreat. A report sent to the chief of staff on September 7, 1989, by the TRA's deputy commander gave a more specific instance: It disclosed that the 140th Brigade had refused to receive his orders.¹⁷⁶ As troops began to retreat, commanders tried in vain to stop them by firing live ammunition from ZU-23 antiaircraft guns.¹⁷⁷

To halt the advance of insurgents, the 102nd Airborne Division was brought from Asmära to Woldya and rushed to Qobbo. On September 3, 1989, however, the insurgents intercepted it at Doro Geber. According to a message intercepted from their radio, the rebels had discovered that the Airborne Division faced a critical shortage of rations and ammunition, and they were trying to destroy it before the arrival of supplies. It was during this engagement that Colonel Gétahun Keflé, commander of the Airborne Division, died, the second of the division's commanders to perish in just a year's time.¹⁷⁸

As the situation around Qobbo worsened, staff officers of the TRA and the

605th Corps left the army behind and moved to Woldya. Commanders running away from battlefields usually spell disaster. At Qobbo, the flight of the commanders led to a complete breakdown of the chain of command.¹⁷⁹ As the army around Qobbo disintegrated, the insurgents attacked it in hot pursuit. Even during this perilous time, troops of the Twenty-Seventh Division and the Thirtieth Mechanized Brigade were still fighting, because they had received no order to withdraw from Qobbo. The command was in such disarray that fighting broke out just outside Woldya between the government troops retreating from Qobbo and the Twenty-Sixth (Wolafān) Division, which had just arrived from Baher Dar as reinforcement. The fighting between friendly units resulted in several deaths and the destruction of three tanks. Chaotic as the situation was, the TRA eventually somehow managed to regroup and rehabilitate troops of the First, Seventeenth, and Twenty-Seventh Divisions as well as the Sixth and Thirtieth Mechanized and the Fifth and Eighth Airborne Brigades at Woldya. Troops were positioned at strategic defense lines around Woldya. Repeated attacks by insurgents on these defenses between September 11 and October 7, 1989, were successfully repulsed.¹⁸⁰

When the insurgents failed to overrun the army's defenses, they bypassed Woldya and moved to western Wollo, leaving only a small force behind. One EPRDF force advanced to southern Gondār along the Woldya-Wārrāta road. Another group—consisting of two TPLF divisions, Aqaqi and Qäy Kokäb, and one EPDM division, Lab Adär—advanced to northern Shāwa and southern Wollo through Wogäl Tēna.¹⁸¹ On September 25, 1989, a TPLF division named Awrora captured Däbrä Zäbit, a strategic place near the Gondār-Wollo border. On the same day, the NROC warned the 603rd Corps that the insurgents had already started to concentrate troops to capture Näfas Māwcha and block the Woldya-Wārrāta road.¹⁸² Brigadier General Abbäbä Häylä Sellasé, commander of the 603rd Corps, had been asking for an infantry division to reinforce his units as early as September 11, 1989. The fall of Däbrä Zäbit into the hands of the insurgents prompted him to send an emotional radio message to Major General Kenfä Gabré'l Denqu, head of operations, on October 5, 1989. The message reads: "I am very much worried by the growing number of enemy forces on all the fronts of our sector. I need an organized division, not separate units. It should be brought either from the SRA or elsewhere. If it is to be done, it should be done right now."¹⁸³ The response from the Operations Department was disappointing. The commander was told in explicit terms that there was no extra division to be sent, and he was advised to count on the 7,000 troops under his command instead of putting forward unacceptable demands.

General Abbäbä was asking for reinforcements for the 603rd Corps not to strengthen the defenses around Näfas Māwcha and Chächäho. He and Gāzahān Worqé, the party secretary of North Gondār, wrongly told the Operations Department that the insurgents had concentrated the bulk of their

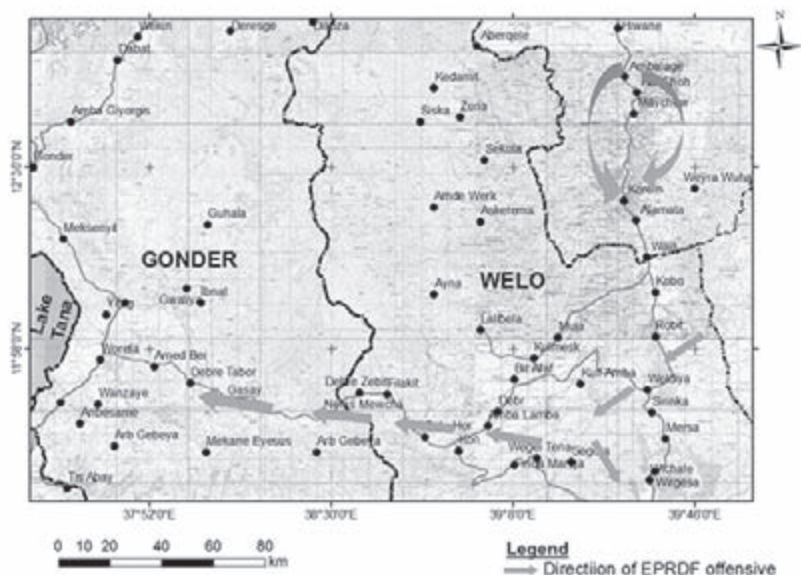
forces in North Gondär. For them, the rebels' advance toward South Gondär was just a deception tactic to divert the army's attention in that direction. Brigadier General Haylé Mälläsä, the party secretary of South Gondär, on the other hand, believed that the insurgents intended to capture Näfas Mäwcha, Kemer Dengay, Däbrä Tabor, and Wärräta and then cut off the Gondär-Addis Ababa road. That was exactly what they did a couple of months later. He thus advised General Abbäbä to station a larger force at Chächäho, a highly strategic place on the Gondär-Wollo border. But General Abbäbä sent only a brigade and a battalion to Chächäho to push the insurgents back. The rebels had already positioned their machine guns at strategic points and refused to be dislodged from the area.¹⁸⁴

It was not difficult to anticipate that the next target of the insurgents would be the town of Näfas Mäwcha. Nonetheless, underestimating the danger on the horizon, General Abbäbä deployed only three infantry battalions and a ballistic missile (BM) battery to Näfas Mäwcha. On October 8, 1989, at 0600 hours, the insurgents mounted another offensive and captured Näfas Mäwcha, scattering the small force stationed there. They also displaced the 603rd Corps advance headquarters and captured some heavy weapons.¹⁸⁵ Once in control of Näfas Mäwcha, the rebels pursued the retreating troops as far as Kemer Dengay, a small town between Näfas Mäwcha and Däbrä Tabor. They did not stop there. On October 9, 1989, at 0505 hours, the insurgents attacked the Eighteenth Brigade stationed at Kemer Dengay. The 603rd Corps soon sent the 133rd Brigade from Däbrä Tabor for reinforcement.¹⁸⁶

Meanwhile, the other EPRDF force that had already moved from Wogäl Tēna to Kuta Bär attacked government positions around Dässé between October 11 and 15, 1989, and captured some strategic heights. It now became pointless as well as dangerous to keep an army unit stationed at Woldya. The 605th Corps therefore ordered the army at Woldya to withdraw from the area and quickly move to Dässé before its supply routes fell into the hands of the insurgents. The army left Woldya on October 14, 1989. Since there were no trucks for immediate evacuation, most of the soldiers had to walk for several weeks all the way to Dässé. Some sold their rifles and exchanged their uniforms for civilian clothes. Others committed suicide, while still others defected to the insurgents. The rest reached Dässé after an arduous trip lasting two to four weeks.¹⁸⁷

While commanders were trying to regroup and rehabilitate troops, the insurgents mounted repeated onslaughts on the Kuta Bär front. The Second Special Commando and the Eighth Airborne Brigades repulsed all attacks, though briefly. Then, on October 18, 1989, the insurgents mounted a simultaneous attack on Wurgéssa, Wuchalé, and Hayq. Army units stationed at these towns were forced to retreat to Dässé. Not to give respite to government troops elsewhere, the rebels on the Kemer Dengay front renewed their offensive and tried to overrun the defenses of the Eighteenth, Twenty-Fifth, and Thirty-Third Brigades.¹⁸⁸

Map 11. The EPRDF offensive between August and December 1989.



To further weaken the TRA, the insurgents stretched their zone of operations from southern Wollo to northern Shäwa. The TRA had already lost the strategic offensive, and it was now tied down in static defense. The commanders of the TRA and of the 603rd and 605th Corps were worried by the worsening military situation. General Telahun Argaw, for instance, was frustrated by the depletion of each division's manpower to 1,500. What were equally disturbing were the feeling of war-weariness and loss of morale among his troops, and the critical shortage of commanders and staff officers from squad to brigade level. He dismissed the special commando brigades (the Green Beret units that had received special training including martial arts by North Koreans) as ill suited for conventional combat.¹⁸⁹

The new TRA commander, Major General Räggsa Jimma, was insisting that various army units under his command should build strong defenses. In contrast, General Abbäbä seems to have realized the dangers of defensive warfare. Now the growing pressure from the insurgents forced him to ask for a reinforcement consisting of a strong infantry division. The Operations Department rejected the request on the ground that the situation did not allow the transfer of a division to Kemer Dengay from any of the other fronts.¹⁹⁰

As government forces remained in their defensive positions, the insurgents continued to engage various units of the 603rd and 605th Corps in southern Gondär, southern Wollo, and northern Shäwa. On November 4, 1989, the first skirmish in northern Shäwa took place at Karra Mesheg, a formidable

fortification reportedly built during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941, at a strategic point sixteen kilometers north of Märañña. Two government platoons moved to the area for reconnaissance. A larger EPRDF unit forced the platoons to fall back to Märañña. A week earlier, the insurgents had made a feint attack on Kuta Bär. The Fifth Airborne Brigade easily repulsed the assault. But the army stationed at Märañña could not withstand the counteroffensive from the rebels. On November 13, 1989, Märañña fell into the hands of the insurgents, and 1,251 government troops were put out of action.¹⁹¹

Some twenty days after the loss of Märañña, the TRA mapped out a campaign known as *Zämächa Mäket* (Operation Defend) to snatch the strategic initiative from the insurgents. To that effect, the famed strike force the Third Division was brought to Dässé from Eritrea. In addition, the 102nd Airborne Division, four Sparta brigades (the 1/81/1, 1/81/3, 2/81/1, and 2/81/3), the Fifteenth and Ninety-Fifth Infantry Brigades, and the 1033rd Commando Brigade were gathered. The Third Division, the Airborne Division, and three Sparta brigades (the 1/81/3, 2/81/1, and 2/81/3) were put under a new task force named Task Force 3B. The rest (the 1/81/1 Sparta Brigade and the Fifteenth and Ninety-Fifth Infantry and the 1033rd Commando Brigades) were placed under the 605th Corps.¹⁹²

The main objective of the operation was to deliver a major blow to the insurgents in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa so as to pave the way for a larger and more comprehensive campaign, which would include southern Gondär. According to the plan, units of the task force would launch a two-pronged offensive toward the Gugufu-Kabé-Wärä Ilu line from Dässé and Harbu. At the same time, the 605th Corps would prevent the concentration of the insurgents against the task force by blocking routes at strategic places and mounting auxiliary attacks.¹⁹³

In the early stage, the government's plan of operation seemed to be working. On December 19, 1989, at 1000 hours, the Third Division, the three Sparta Brigades (the 1/81/3, 2/81/1, and 2/81/3) and the newly added Second Paracommando Brigade advanced to the Gugufu Mountains, strategic high grounds along the Dässé-Wärä Ilu road. The Airborne Division was left at a striking distance to be quickly summoned at any time to beat back a possible counterattack by the insurgents. At 1500 hours, the vanguard units—that is, the Third Division and the Second Paracommando Brigade—attacked EPRDF positions around Tābasit just before reaching Gugufu. The Paracommando Brigade captured a strategic hill with an altitude of 3,707 meters. The insurgents tried in vain to eject the Paracommando Brigade from the high ground by bringing reinforcements. The next day, at 0945 hours, the Third Division and the Paracommando Brigade continued their nibbling advance and captured at 1100 hours the Gugufu Mountains on both sides of the Dässé-Wärä Ilu road. Then, on December 20, 1989, the Airborne Divi-

sion moved forward and struck EPRDF positions at 1600 hours. The division took control of the more strategic Yäwol Mountains and Kabé on the next day following heavy fighting, which continued until 1830 hours.¹⁹⁴

Figure 5. Mount Guguftu, a strategic height along the Däссé-Wärä Ilu road. The EPRDF trenches are still visible.

Photo by the author



To prevent the EPRDF from transferring fighters from southern Gondär to southern Wollo, units of the 603rd Corps were expected to pin down the insurgents on the Kemer Dengay-Este front. Accordingly, on December 20, 1989, the Seventh Division launched a two-pronged attack on EPRDF positions on the Guna Mountains and Zenjäro Gädäl from Däbrä Tabor and Mäkanä Iyäsus (Este), respectively. At 1230 hours, the Eleventh, Eighteenth, and Thirty-Third Brigades controlled Kemer Dengay and its environs, while the Twenty-Eighth and 133rd Brigades from Este captured some areas sixteen kilometers southeast of Mäkanä Iyäsus. On the Kemer Dengay front, however, the insurgents mounted a counteroffensive and pushed the Seventh Division back to Däbrä Tabor following four days of ferocious fighting.¹⁹⁵

While the insurgents continued their counteroffensive on the Kemer Dengay front, those in southern Wollo attacked the 115th Brigade on December 21, 1989, at 0745 hours and captured a strategic area eight kilometers east of

Kuta Bär. The renewed offensive on the Kuta Bär front was intended to halt the army's advance to Wära Ilu. Two battalions of the Fifteenth Brigade and one battalion of the Sixth Mechanized Brigade sent for reinforcement could not push the insurgents back. Then the Eighty-Sixth and the 504th Brigades were rushed to Kuta Bär. The rebels were finally beaten back at 1700 hours.¹⁹⁶

As the fighting continued, the government forces struggled to maintain their gains. By the last week of December, however, they began to lose ground to the insurgents. On December 22, 1989, the rebels stretched the war front to Mänz Enna Geshä *awraja* of Northern Shäwa by attacking the army stationed at Mähal Méda. Mähal Méda, the *awraja* capital, remained under EPRDF control for two weeks. By launching attacks on various units here and there, the insurgents were bent on wearing down government forces. The TRA now had too much to defend. The situation on the Kemer Dengay front was also getting bad for the government troops. On December 23, 1989, the rebels captured Gasay, a small town between Kemer Dengay and Däbrä Tabor. Two days later, they captured Däbrä Tabor and forced the army to retreat as far as Wärräta, a strategic town connecting Baher Dar, Gondär, and Däbrä Tabor. By bringing the whole of the Wärräta-Woldya road under their control, the insurgents scored a major strategic victory.¹⁹⁷

As the insurgents threatened to cut off the Baher Dar-Gondär road, the government moved another strike force, the Fifteenth Infantry Division (the Näbro Division, which means the Tiger) from Eritrea to Baher Dar. Heavy fighting took place for a week at Aläm Sagga, a strategic mountain between Wärräta and Däbrä Tabor. This time, the insurgents could not withstand the army's coordinated counteroffensive. On January 6, 1990, the Seventh, Fifteenth, and Twenty-Fifth Divisions took control of Däbrä Tabor. After a three-day rehabilitation, the three divisions pushed the insurgents back to Kemer Dengay.¹⁹⁸

While the army was trying to regain Kemer Dengay, the 603rd Corps intercepted a radio message exchanged between EPDM leaders—a message that could have been indispensable if exploited wisely. According to the message, the insurgents intended to recapture Däbrä Tabor through a counteroffensive. To that end, they had to transfer most of their fighters to the Guna Mountains, leaving only a small force for defensive purposes around Hayq and Kuta Bär. However, the insurgents could not put that plan into effect immediately because of several problems. To begin with, they had sustained heavy losses as government forces rolled into Däbrä Tabor. Secondly, mutiny and desertion began to rock the TPLF army on the Guna front. Most of the TPLF fighters based around Guna were reported to have shown reluctance to fight and die for somebody else's territory, complaining that they had already completed their mission of regaining Tigray. The TPLF leadership thus had to hold rigorous political education sessions that lasted for weeks throughout Tigray and on all the fronts to stamp out such dangerous opinions among the rank and file.¹⁹⁹

But the TRA failed to exploit the turmoil within the TPLF camp to its own advantage. Units of the 603rd Corps were stationed around Kemer Dengay instead of resuming their counteroffensive as far as Näfas Mäwcha and beyond. They were instead told to enjoy a lavish feast prepared to mark the army's successful counteroffensive from Wärräta to Kemer Dengay. Commanders on that front seem to have lost heart about launching a major counteroffensive. In hindsight, the commander and deputy commander of the 603rd Corps as well as the corps's intelligence officer deeply regretted the serious tactical blunder they had committed. Instead of pushing the insurgents back as far as Däbrä Zäbit, the commanders lamented, they gave the rebels a breathing space to regroup and mount a large-scale counteroffensive.²⁰⁰

The only unit that succeeded in making good advances for a significant period was the Third Division stationed in southern Wollo. Although the insurgents tried to halt its advance by attacking Kuta Bär, the Third Division captured Wärrä Ilu on January 12, 1990. In an attempt to distract the army's attention, the insurgents once again attacked. On January 14, 1990, at 0130 hours, the rebels struck at the Seventeenth, Eighty-Sixth, Ninety-First, and 115th Brigades stationed around Kuta Bär. After overrunning the defenses of the Ninety-First Brigade, the insurgents controlled the Tosa Mountain ranges, threatening to capture Dässé. The Fifth Airborne and the 1/81/3 Special Commando Brigades were quickly dispatched. They dislodged the rebels from the strategic heights of Tosa. But the insurgents resumed their offensive around Kuta Bär. At the same time, they attacked government positions at Tis Abba Lima and Hayq along the Dässé-Woldya road. The First Division was displaced, and Hayq was lost to the insurgents. Within seventy-two hours, the town of Hayq changed hands several times. The Sixth Mechanized Brigade; the Second Paracommando Brigade; the First, Sixteenth, and Ninety-Fifth Infantry Brigades; and the 1033rd Commando Brigade waged a nightlong counteroffensive before regaining Hayq on January 15, 1990, at 0815 hours. The insurgents recaptured Hayq through a counteroffensive at 1700 hours. But they could not hold their position for long. The Second Paracommando Brigade and the Third Division were deployed and drove the rebels out of Hayq on January 16, 1990, at 1200 hours. On the same day, the insurgents captured the command post of the Ninety-First Brigade on the Kuta Bär front and tried to take the town, but on January 19, 1990, they were beaten back once again.²⁰¹

As the insurgents on the Hayq front retreated, the Third and the Eighth Infantry Divisions pursued them. Government troops were able to regain Wuchalé and Wurgéssa. In no more than a week's time, the insurgents prepared strong defenses at Ninni Bär, a highly strategic pass between the towns of Wurgéssa and Märsa, to halt further government advances. Between January 27 and February 10, 1990, the Third and Eighth Divisions tried to overrun those defenses. But the trenches at Ninni Bär proved too strong. The insurgents managed not only to hold their positions but also to push government troops back to Hayq.²⁰²

**Figure 6. Ninni Bär, a strategic pass between Märsa and Wurgéssa.
The narrow pass is seen at the center of the background.**

Photo by the author



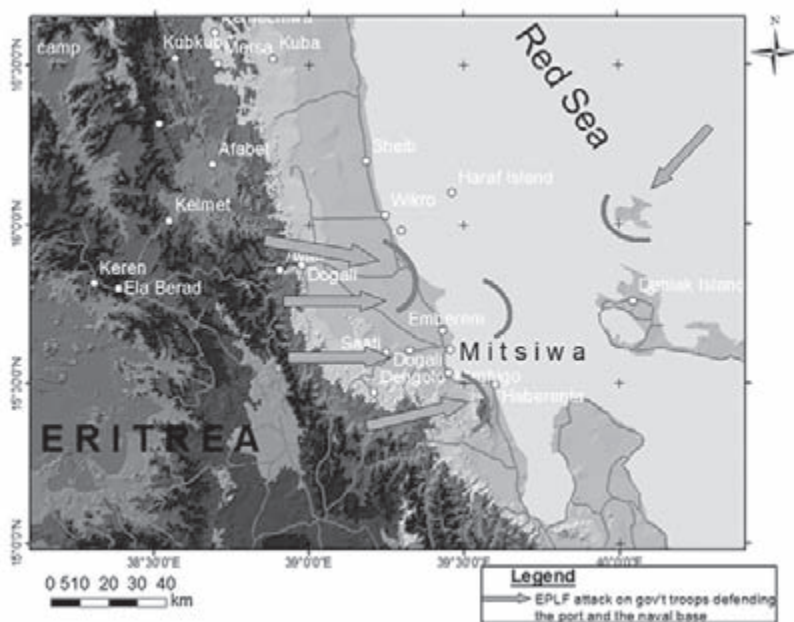
Though repeatedly repulsed, the insurgents kept engaging the army in southern Wollo in January and February 1990. During this period, the EPRDF commanders were designing a major plan of operation to be launched on the Guna front.²⁰³ Probably due to defective intelligence-gathering, the government seemed unaware of the impending disaster. Until that disaster could be delivered, the rebels continued their nibbling attacks on the Kuta Bär and Hayq fronts. Accordingly, on February 12, 1990, the insurgents made another attack on government positions around Hayq and Kuta Bär. But they were beaten back.²⁰⁴

The fall of Meşewa

At about the same time, the EPLF was ready to launch a major offensive named Operation Fänqel (which means “to root out”) in Eritrea to capture the port of Meşewa. To that end, it concentrated four divisions (the Fifty-Second, Seventieth, Eighty-Fifth, and Ninety-Sixth) against the three brigades of the Sixth Nābälbal (Flame) Division stationed at She’eb, eighty-six kilometers northeast of Meşewa. On February 8, 1990, EPLF fighters advancing from Afabēt mounted a lightning attack on government forces at She’eb. Within a few hours, the advance headquarters of the Sixth Division fell into EPLF hands.²⁰⁵

Then, the insurgents rushed toward the Asmara-Meşewa road to cut off supplies and reinforcements destined for the army at Meşewa. The deployment of the Twenty-Ninth Mechanized Brigade from Gahtäläy (fifty kilometers from Meşewa) and aerial bombardment could not halt the advance of the rebels to the Asmara-Meşewa road. Once the insurgents severed the main overland supply route on February 9, their next target was to shell Meşewa airport so that the army at the town would be undersupplied and starved.²⁰⁶

Map 12. The Battle of Meşewa.



In an attempt to reopen the Asmara-Meşewa road, the SRA deployed two famed units, the Eighteenth MID and the Sixteenth Santeq Mechanized Brigade, to Ginda. The two units, however, failed to dislodge the insurgents from their fortified positions. On February 10, Dogali fell into EPLF hands. Brigadier General Täshomä Täsamä, commander of the Sixth Näbälbal Division, repeatedly asked for reinforcements before the rebels put Meşewa airport out of action.²⁰⁷ The command structure was so tied up in bureaucracy that measures were taken too late. The Fifteenth Division and two Sparta brigades were withdrawn from the Guna front and moved to Baher Dar to be airlifted to Meşewa. But the considerable delay helped the insurgents to put

Meşewa airport within artillery range. Now the government was left with three options: to airlift the troops to Asmāra and send them overland to Meşewa; to transport them from Baher Dar to Assāb airport and then move them by ship to the port of Meşewa; or to airlift them to Dahlak airport and move them by ship to Meşewa. Since the EPLF had already deployed its speedboats in the Red Sea and the port itself had come within artillery range, the last two options were abandoned in favor of the first one. By the time reinforcements arrived in Asmāra by air, however, it was too late.²⁰⁸

The insurgents tightened the noose around Meşewa. Government troops that had been stationed at She'eb, Gahtālay, Dogali, and Meşewa were repositioned around the port town. These included the various infantry, mechanized, and artillery units of the Sixth Nābālbāl and the Third Mechanized Divisions. In addition to its overland onslaught, the EPLF mounted a naval offensive on the port. But the Ethiopian navy soon sunk several of its speedboats. On February 11, the insurgents began to shell government positions in Meşewa, including the port and the naval base. A number of stray shells hit the hospital, causing appalling injuries to patients.²⁰⁹ On the same day, the rebels captured the command post at Forto, just outside the town and the airport. General Tāshomā was forced to transfer his command post to the Meşewa palace. The government forces were concentrated at the port and the naval base. Now they had nowhere to fall back. As the insurgents came closer to the naval base, the fighting became fiercer. Government troops piled up wheat and salt sacks to serve as their defense. A ship trying to evacuate families of soldiers and civilian officials was sunk by artillery fire.²¹⁰

While government troops dwindled at an alarming rate, the insurgents were bringing in fresh reinforcements. The ammunition depots had already fallen into EPLF hands. That enabled the rebels to intensify their artillery bombardment on government defenses. To capture the naval base and the port, the insurgents would have to cross an open field, which meant death. They, therefore, preferred to continue their artillery barrage to soften the resistance from government troops. In the meantime, they reduced the port town to rubble. On February 12, for the first time in the nearly thirty-year war in Eritrea, two senior officers surrendered to the EPLF. These were Brigadier Generals Telahun Keflē and Ali Haji, commanders of the 606th Corps and the Third Mechanized Division, respectively. The EPLF used the two generals to send a proposal to General Tāshomā to surrender to the insurgents, which he rejected outright with an insult.²¹¹

Despite untold suffering, the troops at the port continued to resist the insurgents with unprecedented ferocity under their able commander, General Tāshomā. As the rebels came closer to take the port, General Tāshomā committed suicide on February 17, 1990. Similarly, Colonel Bālay Aschānaqi, deputy commander of the Third Mechanized Division, took his own life. About 150 junior commanders and staff officers followed suit. Meşewa was

lost to the insurgents on the same day. The Battle of Meṣewa, one of the bloodiest engagements in Eritrea, decimated the last Nābälbal force.²¹²

The senior officials and the SRA commanders are to blame for the fall of Meṣewa to the EPLF hands. By the time the insurgents mounted their offensive, there were 144,628 troops in Eritrea, and most of them were concentrated around Kärän.²¹³ General Täshomä repeatedly asked his superiors, particularly Major General Hussein Ahmäd, the deputy commander of the SRA, to send him reinforcements before the EPLF put Meṣewa airport within artillery range. General Hussein is said to have been dissatisfied with the appointment of Major General Wubshät Dässé as commander of the SRA, a position he wanted for himself. He thus seems to have made little effort to reinforce the army at Meṣewa.²¹⁴ The senior commanders and officials were so shortsighted that instead of moving troops from Kärän to Meṣewa, they attempted to transport the Fifteenth Division and two Sparta brigades from Däbrä Tabor to Baher Dar and airlift them to Asmära. By the time the troops reached Asmära, the EPLF had already blocked the Asmära-Meṣewa road and started to shell Meṣewa airport with artillery fire.

On the other hand, the withdrawal of the Fifteenth Division and the two Sparta brigades from the Guna front made the remaining three divisions vulnerable to the EPRDF's onslaught. The EPRDF commanders lost no time in concentrating six TPLF divisions on the Guna front, leaving a small force in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa.²¹⁵

The Guna front

As the EPRDF transferred most of its fighters to the Guna front, the 605th Corps and the task force in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa could have scored a stunning victory had they launched a major offensive on their respective fronts. The TRA's other option could have been the transfer of troops from south Wollo and north Shäwa to the Guna front so as to attack the EPRDF fighters arrayed against the 603rd Corps from behind. The TRA took neither of these measures.

The 603rd Corps could deploy only three divisions (the Seventh and Twenty-Fifth Infantry and the 102nd Airborne Divisions) on the Guna front; these did not compare to the huge EPRDF force there. The Seventh Division, one of the three divisions, had been fighting on the same front for six months, and its manpower had dwindled alarmingly. The manpower of the infantry brigades had, for instance, declined to between 575 and 800. That is much lower than 2,099, the number of soldiers an infantry brigade is supposed to have under normal conditions. In an attempt to close the gaps created after the departure of the Fifteenth Division, 4,000 new recruits who had received a brief six-week training were deployed. Just three days before the EPRDF's onslaught, 5,500 former POWs who had been captured, brainwashed, and

freed by the insurgents were brought to Däbrä Tabor for reinforcement.²¹⁶ Two years earlier, Māngestu had instructed his senior commanders not to redeploy former POWs under any circumstances because they might carry a hidden mission from the insurgents.²¹⁷ But the pressing problem seems to have forced commanders to redeploy them after a brief political education. As if to confirm Māngestu's fear, the former POWs were the first to flee when fighting raged.

The insurgents knew this well. They were now ready to strike. "Just before mounting our offensive," the TPLF strategist at the time recollects, "we had carefully studied the positioning of government forces on the Guna front. We had already identified that the 102nd Airborne Division was the center of gravity. To put that division out of action, we concentrated superior forces."²¹⁸ When one looks into the history of modern warfare, such a strategy—that is, the concentration of superior force at a decisive point—is strongly advocated by commanders and military strategists, including Napoleon Bonaparte, Carl von Clausewitz, Mao Tse Tung, and General Vo Nguyen Giap.²¹⁹ Clausewitz, for instance, emphasizes, "The best strategy is to be very strong, first everywhere and then at the decisive point."²²⁰ That was exactly what the EPRDF commanders were trying to achieve on the Guna front.

On February 25, 1990, at 2300 hours, the insurgents launched an all-out offensive on the Guna front from Lewayyé in the south to Atkāna in the north. Their offensive involved a maneuver on the rear. The May Day Division moved from Este, advanced through Mahdārā Maryam, and blocked the Wārāta-Däbrä Tabor road at the strategic pass of Alām Saga after displacing the 503rd Motorized Brigade. The 603rd Corps supply line was then cut off. The Awrora Division from Mount Guna slipped through the gap between the 155th Brigade at Lewayyé and the Thirty-Third Brigade at Shāmāmo. One of the battalions of the 155th Brigade assigned to close the gap was quickly beaten and retreated without reporting its displacement to the brigade commander. The Awrora Division then attacked both the Thirty-Third Brigade at Shāmāmo and the Fifth Airborne Brigade at Azawer Mikaél from behind. The 155th Brigade was ordered to attack the Awrora Division from behind but failed to do so. On the northern sector, the Alula Division from Däbbälīma moved to the west, bypassing the Eleventh Brigade at Atkāna, and then turned south to attack the Twenty-Fifth Division from behind. At the same time, both the Mäqdāla and Ma'ebāl Divisions waged frontal assaults against government units stationed on both sides of the Kemer Dengay-Nāfas Māwcha road. While the Mäqdāla Division attacked the Twenty-Eighth and the 133rd Brigades based around Mārhabété and Kemer Dengay, respectively, the Ma'ebāl Division from Dēnsa and Dedem Şeyon engaged the Second Infantry and the Twenty-Fifth Motorized Brigades positioned at Mägānta. Having slipped through another gap left open, the Aḡazi Division from Moksh and Walga Méda mounted a frontal attack on the Fifth Airborne and the Thirty-Third Infantry Brigades.²²¹

Figure 7. Walga Méda, Mount Guna, a place where bloody fighting took place. The EPRDF erected this monument for the many fighters it lost during the Battle of Guna.

Photo by the author

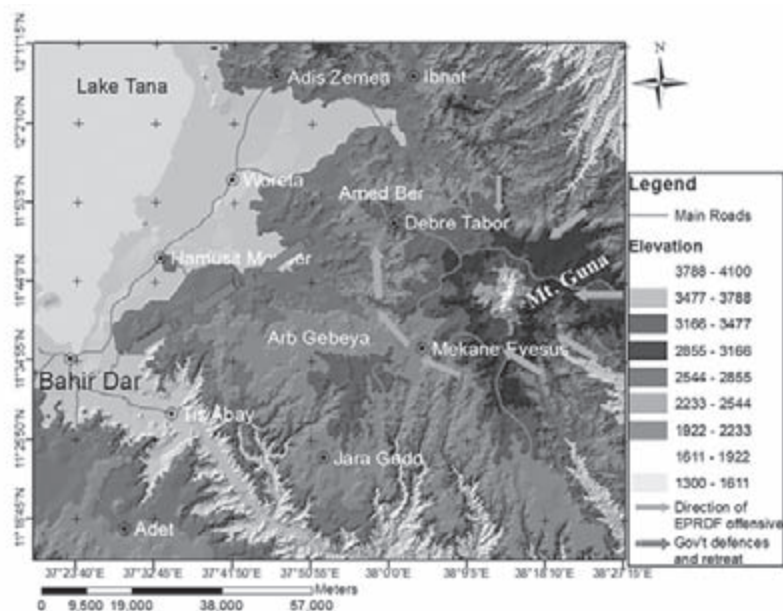


The Twenty-Fifth Division was able to repulse the first EPRDF offensive on the Märhabété, Mägänta, and Walga Méda fronts. But units of the Seventh Division in the southern sector failed to hold their defensive positions and retreated to Gasay. While the Second, Eleventh, Twenty-Eighth, and 154th Brigades of the Twenty-Fifth Division were defending their positions with tenacity, they were ordered to fall back to Gasay by General Abbäbä to avoid encirclement by the insurgents. Just before the fallback, Colonel Mulugéta Mammo, commander of the Twenty-Fifth Division, was ambushed and killed by the rebels while studying the heights to be occupied after the retreat. His death led to the collapse of the division. Almost all former POWs surrendered to the insurgents. By February 26, 1990, the Fifth Airborne, the Twenty-Fifth Motorized, and the Thirty-Third Infantry Brigades were in disarray. Still, the Seventh Airborne Brigade tried to check the advance of the rebels to Däbrä Tabor. The insurgents then began to strike the 603rd Corps command post at Mount Iyäsus, an imposing plateau on the southern outskirts of Däbrä Tabor, with artillery fire. They also shelled the airport.²²²

As the insurgents closed in on Däbrä Tabor, the arms depot was blown up. The commander of the 603rd Corps claims that the situation was so chaotic that he does not still know for sure the person responsible for the destruction of the arms depot. While attempts were being made by the 603rd Corps to move

some tanks from the airport to the western outskirts of the town, the troops began to flee toward Wärräta, leaving the commander and his staff behind. On February 27, 1990, General Abbäbä and his staff left Däbrä Tabor just before the fall of the town into EPRDF hands. The road leading to Wärräta was full of fleeing soldiers. The machine guns positioned by the insurgents at the gate of Aläm Saga, a bottleneck on the way to Wärräta, could not stop the human wave. The demoralized government soldiers passed through the machine-gun trap, suffering heavy casualties. While commanders were attempting to regroup troops, the insurgents shelled Wärräta with artillery fire, forcing the panic-stricken soldiers to flee to Baher Dar. As a last resort to halt the retreating troops, the bridge over the Abbay River (also known as the Blue Nile) was blown up on the orders of senior officials without prior consultation with the commanders of the 603rd Corps. Although the insurgents had returned to Aläm Saga and Däbrä Tabor, government troops continued their retreat as far as Dangela.²²³

Map 13. The Battle of Däbrä Tabor.



Within a span of six days, therefore, the insurgents had overrun government defenses from Mount Guna to Baher Dar. This strategic defeat at the hands of the rebels devastated the morale of government troops in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa. When the insurgents launched another large-scale offensive on March 25, 1990, by attacking government positions

around the Tābasit, Gugufu, and Yāwol Mountains, they faced no determined resistance. Once in control of those strategic heights along the Dässé-Wārā Ilu line, they advanced to northern Shāwa, displacing the First and the Sixteenth Divisions as well as the Sixth Mechanized, the Ninth Infantry, and the 1033rd Commando Brigades.²²⁴ Government troops could not even use the Karra Mesheg fortification to put up stiff resistance when attacked by the insurgents on March 28 at 0835 hours. Within twenty-four hours, Karra Mesheg and Mārañña came under EPRDF control. Right on the heels of government troops, the rebels captured Alām Kātāma on March 30, 1990, at 1030 hours. Within a matter of another six days, the insurgents had thus managed to control all the areas between Tābasit (near Dässé) and Alām Kātāma. Then, between April 6 and 8, 1990, they also captured Rabél and Māhal Méda, scattering the troops deployed to the area.²²⁵ As the insurgents threatened the capital, Addis Ababa, one brigade of the Presidential Guard, three infantry brigades (the Nineteenth, Eighty-Ninth, and 164th), four special commando brigades (the 3/82/3, 4/82/1, 4/82/2, and 4/82/3), and one BM-24 battalion with a total of 12,209 men were deployed to northern Shāwa.²²⁶

On April 12, 1990, at 0645 hours, the insurgents attacked the 1033rd Commando and the 2/81/1 Special Commando Brigades stationed at Karra Qoré and Atayyé and blocked the Addis Ababa-Dässé road. The First and Ninety-Fifth Brigades of the First Division based at Tarma Bär and Shāwa Robit were quickly dispatched to reopen the road. Following fierce fighting that lasted two days, the First Division controlled Atayyé and the Ninety-Fifth Brigade captured Karra Qoré. The road was reopened. Then, on April 16, 1990, the Eighty-Ninth and Nineteenth Brigades began a counteroffensive from Molalé to Māhal Méda. But the Eighty-Ninth Brigade suffered heavy casualties, and the Sixth Mechanized Brigade was sent to reinforce it. The Fourth Division was assigned to coordinate the counteroffensive on the Māhal Méda front. On April 19, 1990, at 0855 hours, the 3/82/3 Special Commando Brigade captured Māhal Méda.²²⁷

Operation Flame

The reopening of the Addis Ababa-Dässé road and the recapture of Māhal Méda encouraged the high command to risk a major offensive along the Wārā Ilu-Karra Mesheg-Alām Kātāma line. Accordingly, senior officers at the MOND planned a huge operation in early May 1990 and sent it to the TRA. The campaign was named Zāmācha Nābālbāl (Operation Flame). The main objective of the operation was to annihilate the whole EPRDF force based in southern Wollo and northern Shāwa. To effect the operation, the TRA gathered six infantry divisions (the First, Third, Fourth, Eighth, Twenty-Sixth, and Twenty-Seventh), one airborne division (the 102nd), four Sparta Brigades

(the 3/82/3, 4/82/1, 4/82/2, and 4/82/3), and one mechanized brigade (the Sixth) in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa.²²⁸

The TRA expected that while most of the troops moved to the Gugufu-Kabé-Wärä Ilu front, the insurgents might attack the army in the Kuta Bär-Hayq area to disrupt the operation. As a precaution, three special commando brigades (the 3/82/3, 4/82/1, and 4/82/3) were brought to Dässé and positioned at key points. The Twenty-Seventh Division was also deployed along the Hayq-Chefra route. To avoid possible attack on isolated units along the Dässé-Assäb road, the 505th Brigade was pulled back from Bati to Kombolcha and the 152nd Brigade from Millé to Bati. The Sixth Mechanized Brigade was stationed at Tarma Bär to be swiftly moved to either Dässé or Lämi, a small town overlooking the Jäma River Valley in northern Shäwa.²²⁹

According to the plan of Operation Flame, the First Division was assigned to secure Rabél, Mähal Méda, Zärät, Molalé, and Tarma Bär. The Fourth Division was supposed to sweep through Lalo Meder, Wogäré, and Dängäz before moving to Aläm Kätäma. Then it would continue its offensive around Märañña and Karra Mesheg. Similarly, the 102nd Airborne Division would stage a mock offensive toward Fitra and Aläm Kätäma and reconnoiter the Jäma Valley during the first phase of the operation. In the subsequent phases, the Airborne Division was expected to capture Aläm Kätäma, Rima, and Därra. The main task of destroying the insurgents along the Dässé-Wärä Ilu-Märañña line was given to the Third Division. To prevent the rebels from sending reinforcements or escaping, the Twenty-Sixth Division was assigned to control the strategic Gimba Mountains west of Dässé.²³⁰

The first phase of Operation Flame went much as planned. On May 21, 1990, the Third Division controlled the Gugufu and Yäwol mountains as well as Kabé, Wärä Ilu, and Dägolo without any fighting. The insurgents had already withdrawn from southern Wollo so as to concentrate fighters between Aläm Kätäma and Karra Mesheg. They might have also planned to lure the government troops deeper so as to stretch the supply lines of the Third Division for an eventual war of annihilation. Similarly, the Twenty-Sixth Division controlled Gimba with minor skirmishes. In accordance with the plan of operation, the Third Division handed over the security of the areas between Gugufu and Wärä Ilu to the Eighth Division before advancing to Karra Mesheg.²³¹

The EPRDF commanders seem to have been well aware of the danger of being encircled. Although successive military setbacks had already demoralized most of the government units, the capabilities of the 102nd Airborne Division and the Third Infantry Division were not to be underestimated. The EPRDF, therefore, planned to rout the two divisions separately, one after the other. The first to be targeted was the Airborne Division based at Lämi. Although the division had suffered heavy casualties on the Guna front, it had been reconstituted with fresh recruits.²³²

While the Third Division was preparing to move to Karra Mesheg, the insurgents mounted a dawn attack on May 22, 1990, around Lāmi to destroy the main strategic force, the 102nd Airborne Division. The Fifth and Sixth Airborne Brigades, which had been deployed to the Jāma River, were attacked, and the TRA ordered them to fall back to Lāmi. Simultaneously, an EPRDF force struck deep into the division's rear and blocked its supply route at Woqālo by forcing the Eighty-Second Battalion to retreat. Another rebel unit disguised as a government force entered Lāmi and attacked the Eighth Airborne Brigade and the division headquarters. The insurgents are reported to have worn uniforms of the airborne troops for deception purposes.²³³

Instead of advancing to Karra Mesheg to obstruct the EPRDF's offensive on the Lāmi front, the Third Division was ordered to stay at Dāgolo. That was one of the TRA's tactical blunders. The main concern now was to save the Airborne Division from destruction. To that end, the Sixth Mechanized and the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth Infantry Brigades were rushed to Lāmi from Dānāba, Gābrā Guracha (also called Gerbe Guracha), and Māhal Méda, respectively. While the 4/82/2 Special Commando Brigade moved from Feché to Lāmi, the 5/82/2 Special Commando Brigade, which had arrived in Addis Ababa from Tolley to be sent to Asmāra, was deployed to Mukāturi, not far from Lāmi. Eleven tanks of the Presidential Guard were also sent to Lāmi. The first units to arrive near Lāmi were the Sixth Mechanized and the 4/82/2 Special Commando Brigades. On May 23, 1990, both brigades fought from 0600 to 1330 hours and came closer to Lāmi. Soon afterward, however, the Special Commando Brigade was pushed back to Woqālo. Then, the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Brigades arrived and spent the night near the Sixth Mechanized Brigade. The next day, at 0400 hours, the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Brigades began a counteroffensive. At 0700 hours, they regained Lāmi, forcing the insurgents to retreat to Fitra and Alām Kātāma. The Fifth and Sixth Airborne Brigades broke the encirclement and fought their way to the west of Lāmi. Out of the 6,421 paratroopers, 3,128 men of the Airborne Division were put out of action (95 killed, 381 wounded, and 2,652 missing in action). Within just three days, the division lost almost half of its manpower. In addition, 729 troops of the Mechanized, Special Commando, and Infantry Brigades were also neutralized (184 killed, 472 wounded, and 73 missing). With regard to the loss of weapons, two tanks, two 122mm artillery, and four BM-24 launchers fell into the hands of the insurgents. On the other hand, the rebels are reported to have lost 1,082 fighters.²³⁴

An ad hoc committee assigned to investigate the main reasons for this damage on the Airborne Division listed a number of factors. Primarily, the division was blamed for its failure to take precautionary measures after receiving vital information about the intention of the insurgents. Besides, commanders from the squad to battalion level were reported to be inexperienced and less committed. The new recruits brought to the division to

replace losses were found to be so poorly trained that some did not even know how to throw hand grenades. Almost all the airborne troops had been complaining that, though trained as paratroopers, they were always deployed as infantrymen. They had already lost confidence in their leaders, and they were becoming ill-disciplined and disillusioned. Though the committee rightly pointed out the major reasons for the near destruction of the Airborne Division, it did not indicate that the unusually high number of troops (2,652 men) missing in action could possibly be linked with disillusionment and loss of morale.²³⁵

Soon after the retreat of the insurgents from Lämi, the Third Division was ordered to resume its advance to Karra Mesheg and Märañña. By then, the insurgents had already had ample time to strengthen their defenses at Karra Mesheg and to gather additional fighters from other fronts. Anyhow, on May 26, 1990, the Third Division advanced to Karra Mesheg. Halting the army at a safe distance, Colonel Säräqä Berhan, commander of the Third Division, his staff officers, and brigade commanders worked out a plan to storm the EPRDF positions at Karra Mesheg after reconnoitering the area. Accordingly, the Ninety-Second Infantry Brigade was assigned to capture the fortress. Then, from the vanguard battalion of the Ninety-Second Brigade, seventeen soldiers who volunteered to storm the EPRDF defenses with hand grenades were picked. Each soldier was given eight hand grenades and an AK-47 assault rifle with 120 bullets. On May 26 at 0200 hours, the seventeen volunteers followed by an infantry company sneaked to Karra Mesheg. As they lurked near their targets, the infantry company slipped through the Dägolo-Märañña road under the cover of darkness and attacked the insurgents from behind. At the same time, the seventeen soldiers stormed the EPRDF defenses with hand grenades. The other units of the Third Division also swiftly arrived and drove the rebels out of Karra Mesheg. The division controlled Karra Mesheg on May 27, 1990, at 0820 hours. Within the next twenty-four hours, the insurgents made seventeen counterattacks, but all were repulsed. The division advanced to Märañña and captured the town on May 29 at 1130 hours following heavy fighting. During the two-day fight, 50 government troops were killed and 211 were wounded. In contrast, 287 rebels were killed and 40 were captured. The insurgents also lost a considerable number of small arms and heavy weapons. Delighted by this victory, Colonel Säräqä gave promotions to about two hundred soldiers ranging from lance corporal to master sergeant.²³⁶

However, the military gains that resulted from the skillful operations of the famous commander and his colleagues could not be sustained. Once again, the high command committed two strategic blunders following the capture of Karra Mesheg and Märañña. First, instead of converging on Aläm Kätäma and smashing the insurgents, the Third Division was ordered to suspend its operations indefinitely. For the next fourteen days, troops of the Third Division remained idle at Märañña and Karra Mesheg.²³⁷ The time lost at those

critical junctures was contrary to military tactics that had proved successful elsewhere. During such critical moments, Napoleon advised commanders never to lose time. For him, the “loss of time is irreparable in war.” “Space, we can recover,” he adds, “lost time never.”²³⁸ Clausewitz, for his part, stresses the indispensability of time: “By rapidity many measures of the enemy are nipped in the bud.”²³⁹

Soon after the capture of Karra Mesheg and Mārañña, the insurgents around Alām Kātāma were thrown into panic. The radio messages intercepted by the army showed that the situation was gloomy for the rebels, at least around Alām Kātāma. But, by suspending the offensive, the high command gave the insurgents a breathing space that enabled them not only to rehabilitate and regroup but also to snatch the strategic initiative once again and then wage a war of annihilation against the Third Division. Second, as the Third Division penetrated deeper into northern Shāwa, strong army units should have protected the strategic points along its supply route all the way to Dässé. The alternative was to move a few infantry divisions from Lāmi to Alām Kātāma and keep in touch with the Third Division. The high command took neither measure.²⁴⁰

By the time the high command designed another ill-timed and clumsy offensive named Zāmācha Nābālbāl II (Operation Flame II), it was too late. The operation had the aim of destroying the insurgents at Alām Kātāma; sweeping through Dārra, Borāna, Tānta, and Wogāl Tēna; and then hunting down the scattered EPRDF fighters. The operation was planned to involve the 102nd Airborne Division, six infantry divisions (the First, Third, Fourth, Eighth, Twenty-Sixth, and Twenty-Seventh), ten infantry brigades (the First, Eleventh, Eighteenth, Nineteenth, Eighty-Ninth, Ninety-Fifth, 149th, 152nd, 164th, and 502nd), five special commando brigades (the 2/82/1, 3/82/3, 4/82/1, 4/82/2, and 4/82/3), and one brigade of the Presidential Guard. Moved from Mārañña, the Fourth Division was assigned to capture Alām Kātāma, Rima, Dārra, Dāngoré Maryam, and Gānda Bārbāré in collaboration with the Nineteenth and Eighty-Ninth Infantry and the 3/82/3 Special Commando Brigades. In the meantime, the 605th Corps would move forces to Kolash and Mount Zoma, and mount an auxiliary offensive. From such strategic points, the corps was expected to fire artillery shells and ballistic missile rockets to EPRDF positions. Similarly, the Third Division would make contacts with the Fourth Division. Whereas the 605th Corps was to give support to both units, the Eleventh, Eighteenth, and 114th Brigades were assigned to control Dārra.²⁴¹

On the southern Wollo sector, the Eighth Division and the 4/82/1 Special Commando Brigade, supported by a battalion of ballistic missile rockets, would gather at Gimba and then control Ajbar, Tānta, and Tārré. The Twenty-Sixth Division would block EPRDF movements from Borāna to Aqesta and Gimba.²⁴²

During the second phase of the operation, the Third Division would hand over Dägolo, Märañña, and Karra Mesheg to the 605th Corps and the First, 164th, and 502nd Brigades. The Third Division would then return to the Dässé area, leaving the Ninety-Fifth Brigade at Wära Ilu and the 4/82/2 and 4/82/3 Special Commando Brigades at Sāño Gäbya and Däraq Amba, respectively. This plan proved more difficult than expected.²⁴³

The rebels counterattack

Operation Flame II was to be launched on June 4, 1990, at 0100 hours. By then, the insurgents had completed their preparation to mount a preemptive offensive from Gimba in the north to Karra Mesheg in the south. For the government troops, the situation was a chilling reminder of the Sheré military disaster. The insurgents gathered even those fighters who had been on sick leave to wipe out the Third Division, which was believed to be Māngestu's pride. This time, too, the rebels adopted Mao Tse Tung's strategy, the concentration of troops, and Napoleon's maxim, maneuver on the rear. Just a day before the launching of Operation Flame II, the insurgents struck government positions at 0630 hours. The 261st, 262nd, and 504th Infantry and the 4/82/1 Special Commando Brigades at Gimba disintegrated. The fall of Gimba into EPRDF hands put the Third Division in jeopardy. To safeguard its supply route, the Third Division sent back three battalions of the Tenth Brigade to Gugufu, but they were intercepted and scattered by the insurgents. After capturing the strategic areas of Gimba on June 3, 1990, the rebels advanced to the Gugufu and Täbasit Mountains. At this critical moment, the TRA commander, who saw problems on the horizon, suggested that the Third Division should be pulled back to Gugufu, before the insurgents severed its supply route. But higher officials flatly rejected his proposal. He was instead instructed to immediately redeploy the Eighth and Twenty-Sixth Infantry Divisions and prevent the insurgents from advancing to the Gugufu-Wära Ilu line. Then the two divisions would control Sāño Gäbya and the Täbasit, Gugufu, and Yäwol Mountains as well as the town of Kabé in collaboration with the Tenth Infantry and three Special Commando Brigades (the 4/81/1, 4/82/1, and 4/82/3). The Third and Fourth Divisions were also ordered to capture Alām Kätäma on June 3, 1990, at 1800 hours. If the two divisions managed to control Alām Kätäma, the Fourth and the Seventh Divisions would move to Rima and Därra, respectively.²⁴⁴

On June 4, 1990, the more strategic Yäwol Mountains along the Dässé-Wära Ilu road fell into EPRDF hands. On the same day, the Third and Fourth Divisions were again ordered to control Alām Kätäma without delay. Accordingly, on June 4, the Nineteenth Brigade crossed the Wonchet River and captured Säs Amba, only about five kilometers short of Alām Kätäma. But the brigade was pushed back at 2400 hours by a larger EPRDF force. On

June 5, 1990, the 502nd Brigade also captured Zoma, an imposing plateau overlooking Alām Kātāma and Sās Amba. Like the Nineteenth Brigade, it was forced to retreat due to a fierce counteroffensive by the insurgents.²⁴⁵ As a plateau between the Wonchet and Jāma Rivers, Zoma has immense strategic importance. An army that controls Zoma could shell Mārañña (north) and Lāmi (south) with artillery fire.

On June 5, at 0300 hours, the Fourth Division again captured Sās Amba. But the insurgents mounted an immediate counteroffensive using heavy machine guns, mortars, and ZU-23 antiaircraft guns and ejected the Fourth Division from Sās Amba. Attempts to capture Zoma by moving troops from Ennāwari failed. While defending Zoma and Sās Amba, the rebels were transferring most of their fighters from south Gondār and south Wollo to Alām Kātāma, Mārañña, and Karra Mesheg so as to encircle and destroy the Third and Fourth Divisions. On June 5, 1990, between 1630 and 1730 hours, the insurgents made a feint attack, which seemed to be a rehearsal for a major offensive. On June 6, the TRA commander was again warned by his superiors that unless the Fourth and Third Divisions captured Alām Kātāma, they could be encircled and destroyed by the insurgents. He was also ordered to capture Kolash (forty kilometers northeast of Alām Kātāma) and Zoma at any cost.²⁴⁶

Just before the EPRDF offensive, the two divisions faced a critical shortage of rations and ammunition. While the embattled soldiers were starving, a helicopter loaded with uniforms and shoes landed at Mārañña. Many troops saw that delivery as a deliberate attempt by higher officials to sabotage the efforts of the Third Division.²⁴⁷

While rations were still scarce, the insurgents launched an offensive on the 4/82/2 Special Commando Brigade at Karra Mesheg on June 11, 1990, at 1400 hours. But they were beaten back at 2200 hours. On the next day, at 0215 hours, the rebels again mounted a simultaneous attack on Karra Mesheg and Dāngoré (about five kilometers south of Mārañña). At 0830 hours, the insurgents overran the defenses of the 4/82/2 Special Commando and the Eighty-Ninth Infantry Brigades at Karra Mesheg and Dāngoré, respectively. Division and brigade commanders tried to regroup the two scattered brigades. In the meantime, the Ninth Brigade sent to retake Dāngoré found it difficult to dislodge the insurgents. The starved troops of the Second Paracommando and the Ninety-Second Infantry Brigades were assigned to recapture Karra Mesheg. On June 12, 1990, following thirteen hours of tenacious fighting, the two brigades finally managed to regain Karra Mesheg and capture many weapons, though with heavy human losses. In the meantime, the Tenth and Eighteenth Infantry and the Eighth Airborne Brigades and the 605th Commando Battalion were sent from Ennāwari to capture Zoma. The mission was costly to the assailants. On June 13, they fought from 0600 to 1530 hours and captured Zoma. Shortly, however, they were driven out of Zoma by the insurgents.²⁴⁸

The fall of Karra Mesheg and Märañña

The worst was yet to come. The Third and Fourth Divisions faced serious manpower depletion. The remaining soldiers were weakened by starvation. As Denis Davydov, a Russian cavalry officer, once put it: “An army unable to refurbish itself will inevitably dwindle and disappear.”²⁴⁹ That misfortune was awaiting the government troops at Märañña and Karra Mesheg. After they were beaten back on June 12, 1990, the insurgents concentrated fighters around the two towns. On June 15, 1990, they launched the final offensive by attacking Karra Mesheg at 0230 hours and Dängoré at 0500 hours. Between 0930 and 1040 hours, they overran the defenses of the Eighty-Ninth Brigade at Dängoré and those of the Second Paracommando Brigade at Karra Mesheg. Both brigades retreated to Märañña.²⁵⁰

Figure 8. The northern parts of the Karra Mesheg fortress.

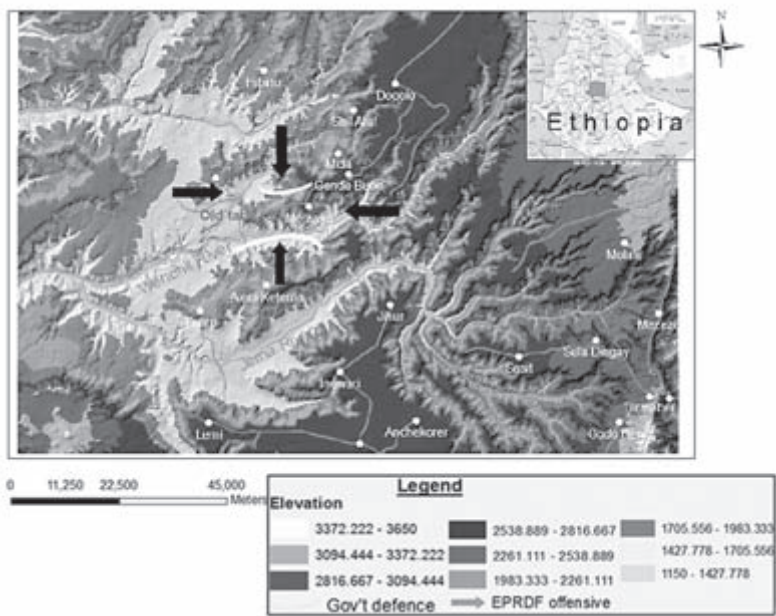
Photos by the author



Figure 9. Distant view of Karra Mesheg.
Photo by the author



Map 14. The Battle of Karra Mesheg-Märañña. The Wonchet and Jäma Rivers are seen north and south of Aläm Kätäma, respectively.



At this critical moment, a helicopter landed at Märañña to evacuate Colonel Säräqä and his staff officers. But he is reported to have refused to leave his army behind. The helicopter instead evacuated the wounded. In the last hours of fighting, several military vehicles, tanks, artillery pieces, and ballistic missile rocket launchers were blown up before they fell into the hands of the insurgents. On June 15, 1990, at 1230 hours, Colonel Säräqä disconnected his radio communication with his superiors.²⁵¹

Säräqä and his staff officers fell into the hands of the insurgents at Läbqa just before crossing the Wonchet River. The remaining troops retreated toward Aheyä Fäjä, and they regrouped at Däbrä Berhan after days of arduous retreat. The Eleventh, Ninety-Seventh, and 160th Infantry Brigades, the Sixth Mechanized Brigade, and the Fifth and Sixth Airborne Brigades, which had been sent from Lämi to attack the insurgents at Aläm Kätäma, were ordered to fall back soon after the fall of Märañña into EPRDF hands.²⁵² In an interview he gave to the insurgents after his capture, he said the main reason for the defeat was the failure of his superiors to reinforce his army. Colonel Säräqä was used by the insurgents to train a mechanized unit before he was imprisoned at Däsè. He fell sick and died after several years of imprisonment.

Figure 10. Tanks and artillery disabled and left behind at Märañña by the army.

Photos by the author



In the three days of fighting (June 11, 12, and 15, 1990), 3,858 troops of the Third Division were put out of action (323 killed, 1,017 wounded, and 2,518 missing). The division also lost, among other things, 13 T-55 tanks, 10 122mm artillery pieces, 30 82mm mortars, 8 ZU-23 antiaircraft guns, 76 RPG-7 launchers, 122 heavy machine guns, 45 light machine guns, 162 M-14 rifles, 3,840 AKM rifles, and 55 various military vehicles.²⁵³

The senior commanders seem to have learned little from earlier military setbacks, particularly the Sheré disaster. The Third Division was ordered to advance deep into northern Shāwa without safeguarding its supply route along the Dässé-Wärä Ilu-Mārañña road. The high command had apparently ignored one of the main tenets of military logistics. As Erwin Rommel reminds us, "Everything possible must be done to protect one's own supply lines."²⁵⁴ Another strategic mistake committed by the high command was the suspension of the army's offensive after the capture of Mārañña. Finally, instead of moving troops from both Lāmi and Mārañña to Alām Kātāma, the army units at Mārañña were ordered to cross the Wonchit Valley alone and capture Alām Kātāma. Such strategic blunders brought about the destruction of the Third and Fourth Divisions.

Following the loss of Meṣewa and the destruction of the Third and Fourth Divisions in northern Shāwa, it became profoundly clear that the fall of Asmāra and Addis Ababa into the hands of the insurgents would be a matter of time. Since the capture of Meṣewa by the EPLF, the SRA faced insurmountable logistical problems. The insurgents had cut off all supply routes leading to Asmāra. As a result, the SRA began to get supplies only by air.²⁵⁵ The situation was so critical that, at times, Ethiopian Airlines had to cancel international flight schedules to transport the much-needed supplies to Asmāra.²⁵⁶ Government troops knew that, if they were to survive, Asmāra airport should be safe from EPLF attacks so that supplies could trickle in. They had to keep the insurgents at bay and prevent Asmāra airport from coming within the EPLF's artillery range. That is why, it seems, the repeated EPLF offensives from various directions were repulsed by government troops until May 1991.²⁵⁷ While the SRA's hold had already shrunk to a radius of fifty kilometers around Asmāra, the TRA was still struggling not to lose its grip on the major supply routes, mainly the Addis Ababa-Assāb, Addis Ababa-Dässé, and Addis Ababa-Gondār roads.²⁵⁸

On its part, the EPRDF was preparing to launch the last offensives toward Addis Ababa. Originally, the EPRDF's plan was to advance to the capital from Dässé. But its intelligence sources revealed that there was a high concentration of government troops along the Dässé-Tarma Bär-Däbrä Berhan line. Then the EPRDF entertained the idea of mounting a deceptive offensive in Asosa to force the government to transfer some of the army units stationed between Däbrä Berhan and Dässé. Such a plan needed the consent of the OLF

and the SPLA. Unfortunately for the EPRDF, both organizations rejected the plan of operation in that area. The EPRDF was thus left with one option: to sweep through Gondär and Gojjam before marching on the capital. The campaign was named Operation Téwodros, and it was led by Hayyälom Araya.²⁵⁹ According to the plan of the operation, EPRDF units from Tigray and Wollo would move along the Chinese-built Woldya-Wärräta road to attack government forces in south Gondär. While other units from Boräna (southwestern Wollo) and Märhabété advanced to Däjän and Goha Şeyon (towns overlooking the Abbay Gorge from the north and south, respectively), additional EPRDF forces from the Molalé, Mähal Méda, and Säla Dengay fronts were transferred to Gojjam. Simultaneously, two EPLF mechanized brigades advanced to Gondär and Dässé through Däbarq and Woldya, respectively, to reinforce the EPRDF fighters.²⁶⁰

The EPRDF launched its offensive on February 23, 1991, by mounting a lightning attack on units of the Fourth Mechanized Division stationed in the southern corners of south Gondär. The insurgents quickly displaced the companies separately stationed at Säné Maryam, Arb Gäbya, Däbrä Sina, and Gälawdéwos, all in south Gondär. In the next few hours, EPRDF forces also attacked isolated army units based at Woji (a small town between Däbrä Tabor and Wärräta), Tis Abbay, Wärräta, and Addis Zämän. Meanwhile, the insurgents shelled the Fourth Mechanized Division's command post at Hamusit (a small town between Baher Dar and Wärräta) with artillery fire.²⁶¹

This time, too, commanders seemed to be unwilling or unable to learn from earlier failures. Instead of positioning troops along the main supply routes, they stationed isolated platoons and companies at nonstrategic points, where they became easy prey for the insurgents. That helped the EPRDF to cut off the main road at Zänzälema (a small village ten kilometers from Baher Dar) and Tara Gädam, a strategic height near Addis Zämän. The Fourth Mechanized Division could not, therefore, get supplies or reinforcements from either Baher Dar or Gondär.²⁶²

The retreat begins

While the insurgents were encircling the Thirty-Third Brigade based at Wärräta, troops of the Fourth Mechanized Division from Hamusit retreated to Baher Dar. Colonel Beruk Däjäné, commander of the division, and his staff officers also rolled their tanks to Baher Dar. As they approached Zänzälema, they were caught in a deadly cross fire coming from machine guns well positioned on strategic hills on either side of the road. That made farther advance difficult. Minutes after he dismounted his tank, Colonel Beruk was hit in the chest with heavy machine gun fire and died instantly. Other officers had to make a detour and follow the shore of Lake Tana before reaching Baher Dar. The Fourth Mechanized Division disintegrated.²⁶³

Some fifty kilometers away, the Thirty-Third Brigade was still fighting alone against the insurgents. To destroy the Thirty-Third Brigade at Wärräta and the 154th Brigade at Addis Zämän separately, the rebels blocked the Wärräta-Addis Zämän road. In an attempt to rescue the 154th Brigade, two battalions were rushed from Qulquwal Bär (a highly strategic pass between Gondär and Addis Zämän). In the meantime, the Thirty-Third Brigade was ordered to force its way to Addis Zämän and join the 154th Brigade. On its way, the Thirty-Third Brigade overran EPRDF positions and captured several tanks before uniting with the 154th Brigade.²⁶⁴

The situation on the Baher Dar front was, however, grave. In addition to controlling the Tis Abbay power station, the insurgents began to fire artillery shells at Baher Dar airport. All jet fighters were thus transferred to Däbrä Zäyet.²⁶⁵

The EPRDF units were effectively using their *qoräta* (cutting off) tactics on all the fronts. While some units were getting close to Baher Dar, the May Day and Awash divisions advanced from Tis Abbay toward Mäshänti and Märawi to cut off the retreating government troops and commanders. Major General Asrat Berru, head of the Revolutionary Operations Command for Region Two (that is, Gondär and Gojjam), and Brigadier General Wasihun Negatu, acting commander of the 603rd Corps, tried in vain to regroup the retreating troops. Before leaving Baher Dar, they held a meeting with other officials to decide what measures to take regarding the huge amount of gasoline stored in the town. Cognizant of the potential dangers of blowing up the fuel or emptying it into Lake Tana, they decided to leave it intact for the EPRDF.²⁶⁶

As part of Baher Dar fell into EPRDF hands on February 25, 1991, at 1440 hours, General Asrat and General Wasihun disconnected their radio communication with Addis Ababa and retreated to Dangela. The insurgents tried to intercept the commanders and capture the weapons and supplies of the 603rd Corps at Mäshänti. But the commanders somehow managed to force their way to Dangela and then to Buré.²⁶⁷

As troops of the 603rd Corps continued their retreat, the insurgents sealed off the main supply route at Däjän. In an attempt to reverse the worsening military situation, the government had already trained 63,897 new recruits by the fall of 1990 at various training camps. Out of these, 20,000 men formed two additional airborne divisions (the 204th and 205th). Just out of the Belatté training center, the 204th Airborne Division was on its way to Gojjam. But the airborne troops came to learn that the insurgents had already severed the main road. They were then ordered to take defensive positions around Feché.²⁶⁸

On their part, troops of the 603rd Corps had only one way left to retreat to Addis Ababa: the Buré-Näqämté road. Before fleeing along the Buré-Näqämté road, units of the 603rd Corps were reinforced by new recruits who had just completed their training at Ber Shäläqo camp. Two brigades from

the same training camp were sent to Däjän to open up the main road to Addis Ababa. But they were beaten back at Däbrä Marqos. Däbrä Marqos fell to the EPRDF on February 27, 1991, at 1230 hours. Then, the insurgents rushed to Buré from Däbrä Marqos and Dangela. By the time they reached Buré, government troops had already retreated to Kirämu, in northeastern Wälläga. On March 6, 1991, three brigades of the newly organized 205th Airborne Division joined the government troops at Kirämu. Three days later, Mängestu arrived at Kirämu to patch up the morale of the soldiers, which had reached nearly its lowest ebb. But apart from criticizing the retreating commanders, there was nothing he could say or do to boost the morale of combatants.²⁶⁹

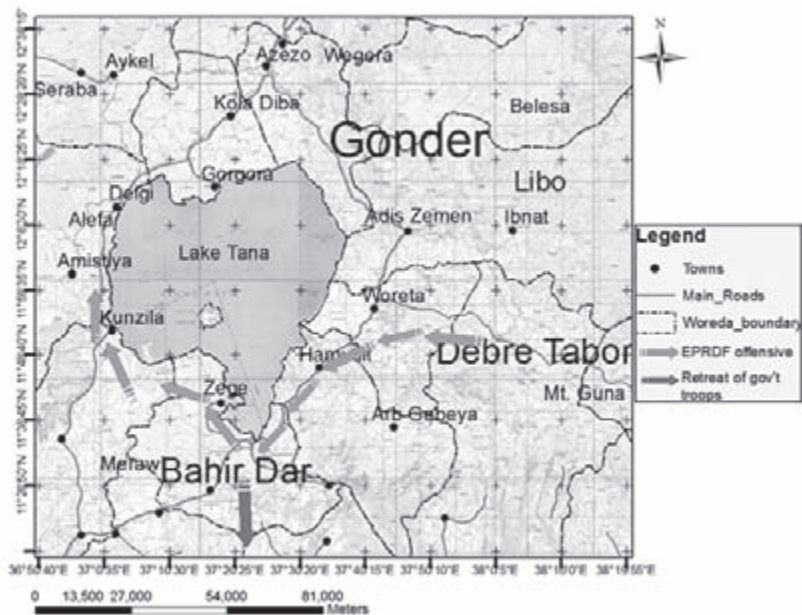
The fall of Gondär

While the government troops were retreating along the Buré-Näqämté line, units of the 603rd Corps based in northern Gondär still continued to put up determined resistance for two weeks. On February 24, 1991, at 1615 hours, EPRDF and EPLF units mounted a coordinated assault on government positions at Gädäbyé, a strategic place between Amba Giorgis and Dabat. On the same day, other EPRDF units attacked the 133rd Brigade stationed between Aykäl and Säräba along the Gondär-Mätämma road. The brigade held on to its position until the arrival of a battalion for reinforcement. Those government troops that were still fighting at Tara Gädam received logistical support from Azäzo, where the airport was still in operation. On February 25, starting at 1600 hours, the EPRDF mechanized unit based between Wärräta and Addis Zämän struck government positions at Tara Gädam and Qulquwal Bär with artillery shells and BM-21 rockets. As a result, the Thirty-Third and the 154th brigades were forced to retreat to Qulquwal Bär.²⁷⁰ On the Aykäl front, though, two battalions of the 133rd Brigade not only held on to their positions but also managed to push the insurgents back and regain Säräba and Aykäl.²⁷¹

As fighting intensified, the army around Gondär received rations, radio batteries, arms, and ammunition by air. While the insurgents were bringing in more than ten tanks to Tara Gädam, the 154th Brigade, which had suffered heavy losses, was taken to Dägoma for rehabilitation. On February 28, 1991, at 1125 hours, EPRDF forces resumed their offensive by attacking Qulquwal Bär. Although jet fighters from Asmära and Azäzo tried to bombard EPRDF positions, Qulquwal Bär fell into the hands of the insurgents at 1500 hours. The Azäzo airport now came within EPRDF's artillery range, and jet fighters and helicopters had to move to Däbrä Zäyet.²⁷²

Now the main fighting came five to ten kilometers closer to Azäzo and seven to ten kilometers closer to Amba Giorgis. On March 2, 1991, the insurgents began to shell the Azäzo airport with artillery fire. On the same day, another EPRDF unit from Qunzela (a small town on the western shore of Lake Tana) advanced to Gorgora through Dälgi. On March 5, at 1700 hours,

Map 15. The EPRDF offensive from Mount Guna to Baher Dar.



Map 16. The EPRDF offensive in February–March 1991.



the insurgents captured Chuwahit, another small town between Gorgora and Gondär. Jet fighters from Asmära bombed EPRDF positions in an attempt to halt the advance of the rebels to Gondär. Although the insurgents were still firing artillery shells at the airport, transport airplanes escorted by jet fighters managed to land at Azäzo on March 6 to unload the much-needed supplies for the army. Eventually, though, all resistance collapsed on March 8, 1991, and Gondär fell into EPRDF hands.²⁷³

The last days of the army

On the Kirämu front, the retreating troops were further reinforced by an infantry battalion with ten tanks from the Presidential Guard and the Thirtieth and Thirty-First Infantry Divisions, newly organized units made up of former POWs released by the insurgents. The total number of soldiers concentrated on the Kirämu front reached 26,804 men.²⁷⁴

More troops were still concentrated along the Däbrä Berhan-Dässé road as well as around Feché. To force the government to transfer some of the divisions from the Däbrä Berhan-Dässé line to Wälläga, the EPRDF launched another campaign named Bilisumaf Walqituma, which means “Freedom and Equality” in the Oromo language. The EPRDF deployed two new divisions of the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization trained in Boräna, Wollo.²⁷⁵

On March 11, 1991, at 0330 hours, therefore, the EPRDF forces attacked the Thirty-First Division. Although the 205th Airborne Division reinforced the division, it retreated in disorder, leaving the paratroopers behind. The Airborne Division was finally forced to retreat. On the following day, the insurgents captured the Abbay Bridge by displacing the Twenty-Eighth and the 150th Brigades. To halt the advance of the rebels, the Thirtieth Division was deployed to Agämsa. The division temporarily succeeded in pushing the insurgents back eight to ten kilometers. On March 13, the rebels intensified their artillery barrage on the Thirtieth Infantry and the 205th Airborne Divisions as well as the 603rd Corps’s command post. Another EPRDF force blocked the road between Agämsa and Kirämu. Even though some of the armored vehicles managed to force their way to Kirämu, most were either destroyed or captured by the insurgents.²⁷⁶

The government kept on trying to halt the insurgents by throwing more reinforcements into battle. On March 14, several special commando brigades were rushed from Däddésa to Angär. In addition, the Sixty-First Ballistic Missile Rocket Battalion from Feché and the Thirty-Third Tank Battalion from the FRA were also sent to Kirämu. As they were receiving additional reinforcements, commanders of the 603rd Corps learned that some EPRDF units were on their way to the Fincha power station. In an attempt to push the insurgents back, the government organized a new task force. As the EPRDF’s Operation

Téwodros came to a close, the government ironically mimicked that name, calling the new task force “Téwodros.”²⁷⁷

After controlling many parts of Wälläga, the EPRDF forces came close to Ambo, where the final engagement took place. As expected, the government was forced to transfer some of its army units from Tarma Bär to Ambo. Still, there were seven divisions along the Dässé-Addis Ababa line: four around Dässé and three between Tarma Bär and Däbrä Berhan. Even then, the EPRDF commanders thought that it was the right time to launch the final offensive, named Operation Waläleñ. On May 20, 1991, the whole area between Dässé and Tarma Bär fell into EPRDF hands. As the insurgents were preparing to control Däbrä Berhan, Mängestu H. Maryam fled the country the next day, first to Nairobi, Kenya, and then to Harare, Zimbabwe.²⁷⁸

The flight of Mängestu precipitated the collapse of the army. Eventually, while the EPLF controlled Asmära on May 24, 1991, the EPRDF forces entered Addis Ababa four days later.²⁷⁹

CHAPTER SEVEN

How the Revolution Changed the Army

The Ethiopian revolution of 1974 fundamentally changed not only the army but also the country as a whole. A group of junior officers who called themselves the *Därg* (Committee) gathered in Addis Ababa in June 1974 to coordinate the revolutionary upheaval. Within a matter of weeks, they overthrew Emperor Haylä Sellasè (often spelled Haile Selassie) and controlled the reins of state power. Because of the growing threat from Somalia and the insurgency in northern Ethiopia, the new military leaders embarked on an unprecedented expansion of the army.

The *Därg*'s declaration of socialism equally changed Ethiopia's foreign relations. The Soviet Union replaced the United States as the main supplier of arms to Ethiopia. The new ideological alignment also brought about 1,700 Soviet military advisers to Ethiopia. The following sections discuss the impact of the revolution and the Soviet military assistance on the army.

The Ethiopian revolution

Haylä Sellasè had ruled Ethiopia as emperor since 1930, except for the years 1936 to 1941, when Italy occupied the country. By the 1960s, many Ethiopians had become dissatisfied with Haylä Sellasè's government. A revolution that would soon engulf the capital was sparked by an army mutiny at Nägällé Boräna, a remote frontier post in southern Ethiopia close to the Kenyan and Somali borders. In January 1974, infantrymen at Nägällé Boräna mutinied in reaction to their worsening living conditions. More specifically, they protested against bad rations, shortage of safe drinking water, and delays in salary payment. To get the attention of higher officials, they detained their immediate commanders. The mutiny did not stop there. Not only did they arrest the commander of the ground forces, Brigadier General Deräsè Dubbalä, but also they sent radio messages to army units in other parts of the country. Although the commander was later released, the mutiny spread to other military units, notably the air force in Däbrä Zäyet, the Fourth Division in Addis Ababa, and the Second Division in Asmära. The mutiny of the latter was even

more serious because it controlled the radio station in Asmāra and boldly demanded a change of government.¹

The protest that began as an army mutiny began to involve other sections of the population in the capital and other major towns. Between February and April 1974, people in the capital staged big strikes and demonstrations against the political order.

While the civilian opposition continued without a unifying body, the soldiers formed a group to coordinate their movement in February 1974. That group came to be called the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the Police and the Territorial Army. The committee invited all military units throughout the country to send their representatives to Addis Ababa to a general meeting. Senior officers above the rank of colonel were deliberately excluded because they were suspected of supporting the imperial government. Some of the senior commanders subsequently became victims of purges and executions. The chief actors of that meeting were thus officers with the rank of major or less. On June 28, 1974, the representatives of all the military units held their meeting at the Fourth Division headquarters in Addis Ababa and officially launched the formation of the Därg. The representatives also elected Major Mängestu H. Maryam and Major Atnafu Abatä as the Därg's chairman and vice chairman, respectively.²

Sometime later, however, Därg members decided that, for the sake of public image, they needed to appoint a senior officer as their figurehead. Accordingly, they appointed Lieutenant General Aman Mikael Andom, commander of the Third Division, to head the Därg on September 13, 1974. Majors Mängestu and Atnafu became first and second vice chairmen of the Därg.³

Between June 28 and September 12, 1974, the Därg took a series of measures to undermine the power of the emperor. Finally, on September 12, 1974, the Därg deposed Haylä Sellasè, one of the world's longest-reigning monarchs, and declared the establishment of the Provisional Military Administrative Council. Later, it became evident that the Därg was not willing to hand over power to a civilian government. As Bahru states, the new military government "came to regard itself as the guardian of the revolution. To return to the barracks was therefore tantamount to betraying it. Once it started shedding blood, it became downright homicidal."⁴

The suppression of dissent

The Därg turned a deaf ear to calls for a provisional people's government. Such calls came not only from various civilian opposition groups but also from some units of the military, such as the army engineers, bodyguards, and army aviators. On October 7, 1974, the opposition from three army units was brutally suppressed. Half a dozen members were killed, and many others were wounded and thrown into jail.⁵

Six weeks later, the Därg took a bloodier measure. On the night of November 23, 1974, which came to be called “bloody Saturday,” the Därg executed sixty junior and senior officials. Of these, thirty-three were members of the military, including five colonels, three brigadier generals, three major generals, one rear admiral, and twelve lieutenant generals. One of the victims was the Därg’s chairman, Lieutenant General Aman, who was accused of counterrevolutionary activities.⁶

After that, executions and purges became common during the revolutionary years. These “revolutionary” measures consumed some of the Därg members themselves. In July 1976, for instance, Major Sisay Habtè, head of the Därg’s Political and Foreign Affairs Committee; Brigadier General Gètachäw Nadäw, commander of the Second Division in Eritrea; and two lieutenants were executed. All were accused of collaborating with “counter-revolutionaries.” Some members of the military council who opposed the heavy-handed rule of the first vice chairman decided to restructure the Därg so as to slash Mängestu’s power. Before they could put their plan into effect, Mängestu and his associates executed seven Därg members on February 3, 1977. The victims included Brigadier Täfäri Bānti (chairman of the Därg), Lieutenant Colonel Asrat Dästa (chairman of the Information and Public Relations Committee), Captain Alämayähu Haylè, and Captain Mogäs W. Mekaèl. Mängestu and his associates accused the victims of working with the main civilian opposition group, known as the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP).⁷

Following the prohibition of all forms of public protest by the Därg, the EPRP had already gone underground. It recruited members through a clandestine network, publishing and distributing anti-Därg leaflets and calling for the formation of a provisional people’s government. In late 1976, the EPRP set up clandestine assassination squads and began to target members of the Därg and the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (*Meison*). In September 1976, the EPRP carried out an assassination attempt on Mängestu. The Därg responded by arresting and executing EPRP members and launching search and destroy campaigns in Addis Ababa. The Därg claimed that it was countering EPRP’s “white terror” with “a revolutionary red terror.” The “red terror” turned Addis Ababa and some other major cities, such as Gondär and Asmära, into slaughterhouses. Suspected EPRP members, Andargachew Tiruneh says, “were herded into trucks, taken to various parts of the cities very early in the morning and executed with a volley of shots, their cries and wails being overheard by the residents of the locality.” During the height of the “red terror,” corpses were left in streets to terrorize the people before being buried in mass graves in secret locations.⁸

During the first round of the “red terror,” the Därg managed to greatly weaken the EPRP. Then in late 1977, it launched the second round of the “red terror.” This time the terror consumed other opposition groups as well.

In March 1978, the Därg declared that the EPRP had been “wiped out completely.”⁹

In November 1977, Mängestu had already executed his own colleague, Major Atnafu Abatä. The latter had openly opposed the Därg’s intolerance toward differing views. He thus became a victim of Mängestu’s sword. Bahru says, “By the beginning of 1978, Mängestu had eliminated all challenges, potential or actual, within the Därg. He had silenced all his civilian critics and opponents.”¹⁰ Mängestu emerged as an undisputed leader of the Därg. He became chairman of the Därg and commander in chief of the armed forces. Following the formation of the Workers’ Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984 and the declaration of the People’s Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1987, he assumed two more positions: general secretary of the party and president of the republic. In the words of Bahru, “The obscure major from Harar has, finally become Ethiopia’s most accomplished dictator.”¹¹

Growing discontent

Military dictatorship bred resentment from different sections of the population. More particularly, there was much discontent within the military toward the totalitarian regime. That discontent greatly affected the commitment and morale of not only the officer corps but also the rank and file. Although open protest was unthinkable, there were indications of dissatisfaction and resentment within the army. Desertions, unauthorized retreat, disclosure of military secrets, poor discipline (such as self-inflicted wounds, rape, plundering, and intoxication) became common among the rank and file. On the part of junior and senior commanders, as well, there were manifestations of dissatisfaction, such as disclosing military secrets, lack of determination to win battles, and unwillingness to deal with grievances of combatants.¹²

The introduction of the compulsory National Military Service (NMS) aggravated the crisis in the army. Although the NMS required all able-bodied citizens between the ages of eighteen and fifty to go through training and active service, the policy of recruitment was wrongly applied. Some irresponsible local officials used it to settle old scores or collect bribes from parents, informants say. In the words of Gebru, the NMS “was neither universal nor egalitarian in practice. It reinforced social inequalities. The conscripts were men not resourceful to circumvent it . . . The rich and well-connected evaded service.” People dismayed by this unfair system of recruitment compared the sons of the rich who fled the country through the Bole international airport with the sons of the poor who went to Tollay, an inhospitable military training center in Kafa near the Gibe River: “Children of the rich go to Bole; children of the poor go to Tole [Tolay].”¹³

Each administrative region was given a quota of recruits to be sent to training centers. Local officials found it impossible to get an adequate number of

volunteers for the NMS. Quite often, they resorted to forceful conscription to meet their quotas. That added fuel to the fire of public resentment toward the military regime. Conscription was so unpopular that all the training centers reported unusually many desertions and disappearances.¹⁴

Those conscripts who completed the six-month training were committed to a two-year active service. They were deployed to various fronts and mixed up with regular units. But instead of reinforcing their fellow combatants, they became catalysts of resentment within the army. They were the first to retreat whenever fighting broke out. They were reported to have confided to their friends: "Why should I sacrifice myself for a government that sent me to the war front against my will?" One regular soldier asserts, "They were the ones who taught us how to retreat and save our lives." For other conscripts, it was much better to just disappear or join the insurgents.¹⁵

Those conscripts from rural villages had their own grievances. They had been listening to the complaints of their parents, who opposed the forceful resettlement and villagization programs, which forced rural people to move from their ancestral lands to other areas of the country and to gather in villages. Rural people also objected to the obligatory selling of their produce to the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC). The sons of peasants conscripted into the army thus brought their own grievances to the various fronts. By introducing the compulsory NMS, the government was deploying not only less-committed combatants but also its own opponents who spread grievances within the army.¹⁶ Let us now turn to the assistance the army received from the Soviets.

The mixed blessing of Soviet military assistance

By the time the Ethiopian revolution broke out in 1974, the Soviets had already established friendly relations with the government of Somalia. The Somali leader, Mohamed Siad Barre, had embraced socialism and allowed the Soviets to take control of a naval base at Berbera. In return, the Soviets had already started to train and arm the Somali armed forces.¹⁷

Despite their close relations with Somalia, the Soviets were carefully following the course of the Ethiopian revolution. The striking similarities between Ethiopia and Russia seem to have influenced the Soviets to attach much importance to the Ethiopian revolution. Both countries had a long imperial tradition and a big population of Orthodox Christians. In the eyes of the Soviets, Ethiopia offered more advantages than Somalia. It had a central place in the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and it was the second most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, according to Soviet assessments, the Ethiopian military leaders were more committed to socialism than their counterparts in Somalia. More specifically, after the emergence of hard-liners led by Māngestu H. Maryam in February 1977, the

Soviets hoped that the military government would transform Ethiopia into a Communist state.¹⁸

But the Soviets could not abandon Somalia at once. Following the outbreak of the Somali-Ethiopian war in July 1977, they began to supply weapons to both countries, which continued for five months. In late November 1977, however, Siad Barre, who was enraged by the growing shipments of arms to Ethiopia, expelled all Soviet and Cuban military advisers from Somalia.¹⁹

The Soviet Union transferred its military advisers to Ethiopia. Within a matter of months, the number of Soviet military advisers in Ethiopia grew to 1,700. The Soviets brought with them Cuban troops, whose number was estimated between 12,000 and 18,000.²⁰ Ideological solidarity also brought South Yemeni soldiers to the Ethiopian side during the Somali-Ethiopian war. Soviet advisers brought with them vital military intelligence about Somali armed forces. In addition to the large amounts of military hardware they provided to the Ethiopian army, the Soviet military advisers helped Ethiopian commanders to plan a huge counteroffensive against Somali invaders. The Cuban contingent also took part in the final counteroffensive against Somali forces, and 163 Cuban combatants lost their lives during that decisive engagement. In the final analysis, the Soviet, Cuban, and South Yemeni support contributed to the Ethiopian victory over Somalia in March 1978.²¹

However, the assistance the army received from the Soviet military advisers in its counterinsurgency operations in northern Ethiopia proved defective. In his study titled *The Blind Leading the Blind: Soviet Advisors, Counter-Insurgency and Nation-Building in Afghanistan*, Artemy Kalinovsky discusses the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 and the Soviets' failure to defeat the *mujahedeen*, the rebels who were fighting against the Afghanistan central government.²² Another writer, Scott McMichael, argues that the Soviets intervened in Afghanistan without a clear counterinsurgency strategy.²³

The mountains of Afghanistan resemble the Sahel Mountains in northern Eritrea, where the EPLF rebels had entrenched themselves since 1977. The Soviet military advisers seemed to have learned no vital lessons from their misadventure in Afghanistan. The counterinsurgency plan of operation they prepared with Ethiopian commanders did not work. Following the unsuccessful attempt to storm Naqfa in 1978–1979, two huge military operations were designed to wipe out EPLF guerrillas and capture their last stronghold. Soviet military advisers are reported to have been heavily involved in the planning and execution of these operations. According to a declassified report from the CIA, General Vasily Petrov, commander of the Soviet ground forces, stayed in Ethiopia for weeks during one of the biggest operations, Operation Red Star, launched in February 1982 to capture Naqfa. The Soviet general was there to advise Ethiopian commanders in the execution of that big counterinsurgency operation.²⁴

The huge counterinsurgency operation launched three years later to capture Naqfa also failed miserably to achieve its goals. The lack of success of these operations showed the impracticality and unsuitability of the Soviet military strategy for the Ethiopian counterinsurgency campaigns against the Eritrean insurgents. The failures increased the resentment toward the Soviet military advisers. Although enormous Soviet arms shipments since 1977 made the Ethiopian army one of the largest and best-equipped ground forces in Africa, the Soviets were often criticized for several reasons. First and foremost, the Soviets were blamed for their reluctance to develop a local weapons maintenance system in Ethiopia. They were not ready to train mechanics and technicians who could maintain and repair Soviet-made weapons and military vehicles. The problem was even more chronic in maintaining and overhauling aircraft and ship engines.²⁵ The Soviet military advisers made it obligatory to send such engines to the Soviet Union for maintenance and overhauls. To make matters worse, they charged the Ethiopian government much hard currency for such services.²⁶ Concerning this troubled relationship, the CIA report remarks:

The Ethiopians resent the fact that Soviet aid often has consisted of reconditioned equipment that requires frequent maintenance . . . Soviet shipments of essential support items frequently have been late or incomplete . . . Such shortfalls are to some extent intentionally designed to foster Ethiopian dependency . . . The Soviet arms sale relationship with Ethiopia has many other built-in mechanisms for reinforcing dependency.²⁷

Secondly, the Soviets were criticized for considerable delays in supplying vital spare parts for various weapon systems. On several occasions, they even responded that some of the required spare parts were out of production or in short supply.²⁸

Thirdly, the Soviets had been permitted by the Ethiopian government to set up naval facilities on the Dahlak Islands and to conduct antisubmarine reconnaissance flights over the Red Sea and Indian Ocean from Asmara airfield. But they abused their rights to carry out unrestricted fishing activities and plundered thousands of tons of fish from Ethiopian waters. Although Mängestu was asked to do something to stop this illegal fishing, he preferred to remain silent for fear of unwanted consequences; that is, suspension of Soviet arms shipments.²⁹

Fourthly, Ethiopian commanders viewed the Soviet military advisers as arrogant and unfriendly. They did not get along with competent Ethiopian military officers. They were, for instance, at odds with Major General Fanta Bälai, who was commander of the Ethiopian air force. They also used their

leverage to influence political decisions. They are reported to have asked Māngestu to demote or transfer those military commanders who did not value the role of the Soviet military advisers.³⁰

Fifthly, the Soviets were also criticized for being indifferent to the economic crisis in Ethiopia brought about by the civil war and crushing international debt. Without taking Ethiopia's poverty into consideration, the Soviets usually wanted to squeeze the Ethiopian government to repay what it owed the Soviet Union.³¹

Finally, Ethiopian commanders were bitterly disappointed by the Soviet counterinsurgency strategy. To the dismay of the Ethiopian government, all operations miserably failed to overwhelm the northern insurgents.³²

As the winds of change began to blow in the Communist world, Soviet arms shipments began to decline considerably in the second half of the 1980s. Then, the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev told Māngestu to abandon the military solution to the problem in Eritrea.³³ The substantial decline in the supply of Soviet weapons coincided with the loss of major battles in Eritrea and Tigray. The army suffered major military reverses in the battles of Afabét (March 1988), Sheré (February 1989), Guna (February 1990), and Meşewa (February 1990). Although the army acquired weapons from new suppliers, such as North Korea and Israel, in 1989 and 1990, the new sources did not save it from total collapse in 1991.³⁴

Conclusion

On May 21, 1991, Māngestu H. Maryam fled the country, which precipitated the disintegration of the army. As rightly described by Bahru, Māngestu's downfall was "an event of historic proportions" because "it marked not only the end of a regime . . . but also the smashing of a military apparatus which, at least in its modern shape, was about half a century old." Bahru argues that it was "the Ethiopian—and not simply the Dārg's army" that was destroyed. "It is not only a military regime that has come to its demise; it is also the military as an institution that has been wiped out."¹

What makes the collapse of the army so puzzling is the fact that it was beaten by insurgent groups who mustered notably fewer fighters and less firepower. This inconvenient truth contradicts conventional wisdom as well as Napoleon's maxim: "Victory goes to the large battalion."² Why, then, did the Ethiopian army—one of the most heavily armed ground forces in Africa at nearly half a million strong—lose the war against the northern insurgents, whose combined manpower was less than one-third that of the army?³

In trying to answer this basic question, it may be inappropriate to enumerate all the army's mistakes and misfortunes. I would rather concentrate on some fundamental factors that made the army vulnerable to the onslaught of the insurgents and finally brought about its demise.

Loss of public support

When the Ethiopian revolution broke out in 1974, many Ethiopians predicted that a bright future was awaiting the country just around the corner. Soon after its formation, the Dārg announced its leading principle and motto: "*Ethiopian teqdām yālāmenem dām*" (Let Ethiopia be first without bloodshed). Though short-lived, it was indeed a famous slogan. However, between late 1974 and early 1977, the Dārg carried out brutal executions and massacres. More particularly, during the dark days of the reign of terror, tens of thousands of young people were ruthlessly tortured, massacred, and dumped in mass graves on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. The country experienced un-

precedented political violence. The reign of terror clearly showed that any form of opposition to the military government would be dealt with mercilessly. As a result, the military government lost public support soon after it assumed power.⁴

A series of other unpopular measures undertaken by the military government further alienated it from the masses. The Därg was fond of mobilizing the people for various *Zämächa* (campaigns), both military and nonmilitary. As Somalia was preparing to invade Ethiopia, the military government was determined to raise a militia force of 300,000 men. Urban and rural *qābālē* (the smallest administrative unit) officials were instructed to recruit as many volunteers as possible. Since the number of volunteers was much lower than expected, officials resorted to forceful conscription. Many people were arrested and sent to training camps against their will. To make matters worse, they were not allowed to return to their villages after the defeat of Somalia. They were rather transferred to the northern front and forced to stay in foxholes for years. That brought about resentment toward the military regime.⁵

The war against Somalia was followed by the *Aränguadēw Zämächa* (Green Campaign), an undertaking intended to increase agricultural production. The military government had already brought private plantations and farms under state control in early 1975. Some of these farms were in Sätit Humära, northwestern Gondar, and the Awash Valley. Since most of the state farms were in inhospitable lowlands, they had far fewer workers than they required. The military government, therefore, rounded up peasants in many rural villages and sent them to Sätit Humära and Tändaho as forced laborers during weeding and harvesting seasons. The area was known for its malaria. Many peasants died of the disease. People then blamed the military government for sending many peasants to their death.⁶

In 1983, the military government introduced the compulsory National Military Service (NMS). The NMS turned out to be a much abused and hated policy. The quota system was introduced once again. Regional and local officials were required to send a specified number of volunteers to the NMS training centers. However, there was widespread reluctance to voluntarily join the NMS. Possible recruits used various mechanisms of evading military service. The well-to-do could either bribe local officials or send their sons abroad so as to escape the NMS. More and more youngsters went into hiding or trekked across arid lowlands into neighboring countries instead of falling into the hands of local officials. At the end of the day, only the sons of the poor were sent to the NMS against their will to serve as cannon fodder for the never-ending war. The dreadful rounds of recruitment were times of national grief when the military government encountered widespread but silent resistance.⁷

While the NMS was universally resisted in both urban and rural areas, three more unpopular policies further alienated the peasantry. One of these

was the establishment of the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) in 1976. The AMC was founded with the intention of purchasing grain from peasants at lower prices and storing it in big granaries for emergency purposes. Although the military government initiated the program in good faith to create a national grain reserve in case of drought or widespread crop failure, the policy was wrongly applied. It later became obligatory for each peasant to supply the AMC a fixed amount of grain. Peasants who had no surplus had to sell their sheep and goats to buy grain from others and give it to the AMC at a price lower than the market price. The AMC was thus one of the most hated government agencies.⁸

The rural population hated the twin policies of resettlement and villagization equally. The first was introduced in response to the 1984–1985 famine. Peasants from famine-stricken areas of Tigray, Wollo, eastern Gondär, and northern Shäwa were rounded up and taken to new resettlement sites in western and southwestern Ethiopia. Although the new sites were fertile, little preparation was made to host the new inhabitants. Among other things, the resettlement sites were infested with malaria and yellow fever. These tropical diseases claimed the lives of many settlers. The great majority preferred to return to their ancestral villages rather than die in the new sites. Many peasants tried to walk hundreds of kilometers in an attempt to go back to their former villages. Only a few succeeded. Others were devoured by wild animals or died of other causes on their way.⁹

Peasants also generally opposed the villagization program. The government intended to combine small and scattered hamlets into big villages for security and socioeconomic reasons. To that end, peasants were obliged to demolish their houses and move to the new villages. Moving was not easy. Firstly, they had to abandon their gardens, some with established fruit orchards. Secondly, they needed additional wood to build their new houses, which was hard to come by. In some areas, the government deployed the army to “help” peasants demolish their houses before moving to the new villages. As Gebru remarks, “Villagization, like resettlement, was socially disruptive; it destroyed age-old horticultural techniques and social practices, as well as damaging fragile ecosystems, without delivering the promised services.”¹⁰

In the final analysis, the military government turned both the rural and urban population against it through a series of unpopular policies. That loss of support had a considerable effect on the army. As Leon Trotsky stated, “The army is a copy of society and suffers from all its diseases.”¹¹ If that was the case, how could the government win the war without public support?

Weak counterinsurgency strategy

In March 1978, the Ethiopian army scored a decisive victory over the Somali forces by applying conventional military tactics and strategy.¹² Soon after the

defeat of Somalia, the Dārg declared, "The victory in the east would be repeated in the north."¹³ The government was determined to score another victory over the northern insurgents by applying the same conventional tactics and strategy employed against the Somali forces. That stubbornness was the genesis of the problem. To its credit, the army momentarily managed to expel the rebels from the extensive territory they had occupied through a highly coordinated counteroffensive. That victory was achieved mainly because the win over Somalia was still fresh, morale was high, and revolutionary fervor was strong among government troops. But the victory was only temporary. As later events were to show, the application of conventional tactics against the northern insurgents could not work.¹⁴ History has proved that a counterinsurgent force with the strongest military muscle cannot achieve a lasting military victory as long as insurgents are fully supported by the population.¹⁵

When confronted with insurgency, government troops are advised to employ tactics and strategy different from that of a conventional war. Various authorities recommend a set of tactics and strategy to be employed in counterinsurgency operations. For John McCuen, an American army officer, insurgents could only be defeated by applying their "strategy and principles in reverse."¹⁶ But David Galula, a French colonel and counterinsurgency expert, and Robert Taber, a journalist who covered many rebellions in the 1950s and 1960s, reject McCuen's hypothesis. In trying to show the impracticality of McCuen's theory, Galula argues: "Insurgency warfare is specially designed to allow the camp afflicted with congenital weakness to acquire strength progressively while fighting. The counterinsurgent is endowed with congenital strength, for him to adopt the insurgent's warfare would be the same as for a giant to try to fit in to a dwarf's clothing."¹⁷ On his part, Taber maintains that the counterinsurgent could not use the insurgent's strategy primarily because he "has extensive holdings to protect." In contrast, the insurgent has no "expensive and cumbersome military establishment to maintain." The counterinsurgent, on the other hand, "suffers the dog's disadvantages: too much to defend."¹⁸

If that is the case, what kind of tactics and strategy would be effective in counterinsurgency operations? First and foremost, the planning of a counterinsurgency operation should be based on a belief in Mao Tse Tung's famous analogy between an insurgent and a fish. According to him, as the sea is vital for a fish, so is the population crucial for the insurgent. Once the insurgent wins its active support, the population is "his camouflage, his recruiting office, his communication network and his efficient, all-seeing intelligence service."¹⁹

With this contention in mind, the principal objective of a counterinsurgency operation should be to win the hearts and minds of the population affected by an insurgency. Needless to say, the active support of the population is as absolutely vital for government forces involved in counterinsurgency as it is for insurgents. Galula advises that the counterinsurgent needs not only to

get support “in the form of sympathy and approval but also in active participation in the fight against the insurgent.” Without the active support of the population, the counterinsurgent will find it impossible to destroy the insurgent’s clandestine political organization, without which any victory would be temporary and superficial. For Galula, victory means “the permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population, isolation not enforced upon the population but maintained by and with the population.”²⁰ McCuen, on his part, warns that if counterinsurgent forces employ such methods as “intimidation, sanctions and dislocation” in an attempt to alienate the insurgents from the population, “they will antagonize and lose the vital support of the people.”²¹ Let us now examine what the Ethiopian army was doing in practice against the northern insurgents.

Time and again, the Military Intelligence and the Military Security services reported that the northern insurgents had the support of the great majority of the population in the areas of their operation.²² Despite this vital intelligence at hand, the government attempted to win a purely military victory by deploying superior manpower and concentrating stronger firepower.²³ In 1978, while sweeping through northwestern Gondär, Tigray, and Eritrea, the army’s counteroffensive primarily aimed at driving the insurgents out of the territory they had occupied. In the wake of that military victory, the government in fact tried to extend its administrative structure in the newly controlled areas without gaining the support of the local population and destroying the underground political organization of the rebels. While expelling the insurgents from extensive territory, the army left behind no other units in the newly controlled areas that could prevent the rebels from coming back and reestablishing themselves within the population.²⁴

According to Galula, counterinsurgency operation should involve two types of forces: mobile and static units, each with distinct objectives. The mobile units would carry out military operations; the static groups would stay behind to accomplish a wide range of tasks. Among other things, the static units would protect the population, win its active support, conduct censuses, implement socioeconomic reforms, gather intelligence about insurgents, and destroy their clandestine political organization. Otherwise, military victory alone could not bring about the permanent isolation of insurgents from the local population and their eventual defeat.²⁵

In retrospect, it was this vital package of activities that had been largely missing in the army’s counterinsurgency operation against the northern insurgents. The army’s sweeping victory between June 1978 and January 1979 had raised the expectation that the government might achieve total military victory over the northern rebel groups. But that proved wrong when the fighting stalemated and the army failed to regain Naqfa.²⁶

The failure to storm Naqfa prompted the Soviet military advisers to propose the training of mountain infantry divisions. That resulted in the birth of

four infantry divisions trained in conventional mountain warfare. In addition to taking Soviet advice, attempts were made to draw essential lessons from the war in Vietnam. A couple of months before the launching of Operation Red Star, the Därg invited General Vo Nguyen Giap, the brilliant Vietnamese military commander who led the revolutionary war against the French and American forces, to visit Ethiopia.²⁷ General Giap is said to have been flown over the Sahel Mountains and been asked for advice. He is reported to have hinted at the difficulty of achieving a military victory over the insurgents strongly entrenched in those mountains.²⁸ In this regard, the Vietnamese had an essential experience worth adapting. During the war, the North Vietnamese forces had guiding principles enshrined in the "Oath of Honor." The ninth point of the oath underlined the need "to respect the people, to help the people, to defend the people . . . in order to win their confidence and affection and achieve a perfect understanding between the people and the army."²⁹

Admittedly, there were times when the Därg took some measures to try to win the support of Eritreans. A case in point was what it did in Eritrea on the eve of Operation Red Star. As part of a conciliatory gesture, Mängestu toured Eritrea, including the Dahlak Islands, in early December 1981.³⁰ A couple of months later, a three-day colorful ceremony known as the Meşewa Festival was held at the port city of Meşewa. In the meantime, the government began to distribute among the population in Eritrea consumer goods, which had been in short supply. In an attempt to further impress the Eritrean population, the government allocated a huge sum of money for the reconstruction of infrastructure damaged by the war. For instance, 5.5 million birr (about U.S. \$2.66 million) was earmarked for the city of Asmāra alone. Besides, the government launched a propaganda campaign to win public support in Eritrea. To that end, Asmāra Radio began to broadcast programs on the Red Star Multifaceted Campaign, as the operation was known initially.³¹ The main reason for publicizing Operation Red Star well before the zero hour might have been to obtain public support in Eritrea. Otherwise, the military operation should have been kept secret even if nothing seemed to remain hidden from the insurgents.³²

In addition to the political and socioeconomic measures, a symposium on Ethiopia's anticolonial struggle was held in Asmāra at the end of January 1982. That gathering was accompanied by another attempt to win the hearts and minds of Eritreans, the erection of monuments honoring *Ras* Alula Engeda (*Abba Nägga*) and Zare'ay Dārās, both heroes in Eritrea for defending Ethiopia against Italian occupation.³³

Although the government had undertaken all these military, political, and socioeconomic measures, the Red Star campaign failed. Why? In the first place, all these goodwill gestures not only came too late but also were short-lived and cosmetic. Once the military operation was launched, the government put aside socioeconomic programs. Dawit W. Giorgis, then the admin-

istrator of Eritrea, laments: "The spectacular 'Red Star' campaign with all its enthusiasm, and idealism, all its hope of finally solving the Eritrean problem, came to a dead end. Except for some reconstruction of destroyed power and communications installations, none of the other projects were completed."³⁴

Secondly, apart from monotonously teaching the theories of Marxism-Leninism, the government made no attempt to indoctrinate troops to carefully handle the population in insurgency-affected areas. The mountain infantrymen were trained to beat insurgents in mountain warfare but not to win the support and affection of the local population. In the end, the population that could have been the best source of intelligence identified itself with the rebels. Not only did it deny the army information about the insurgents, but also it usually reported every movement of government troops to the rebels.³⁵

The government's failure to win public support was exacerbated by the victory of the insurgents. The loss of Afabét in 1988 marked not only a major reversal of the army's counterinsurgency operations but also the complete alienation of the government from the rural population in northern Ethiopia. Possibly out of desperation, government troops began to take severe measures against civilians who were suspected of supporting the insurgents. For instance, on May 12, 1988, the army put to death a number of civilians at She'eb, during an operation aimed at regaining Afabét.³⁶ Similarly, during the first phase of Operation Adwa in June 1988, combatants of the Ninth Division resorted to brutal measures such as burning houses and killing peasants in an attempt to punish civilians around Hägärä Sälam in Tigray who were accused of supporting the insurgents.³⁷

The government aggravated its own alienation from the population by carrying out air strikes on civilian targets. Between 1988 and 1991, the air force bombed targets in villages and towns that were believed to have something to do with the insurgents. Those bombings resulted in the death of many civilians in Eritrea, Tigray, Wollo, Gondär, and northern Shäwa.³⁸

Besides, the various offenses committed by disillusioned and ill-disciplined government troops added fuel to the flames of public opposition. Between 1988 and 1991, frequent reports of rape reached the MOND. Even married women and nuns living in monasteries were not spared.³⁹ One can imagine how such offenses could shock the population that had already been alienated owing to other grievances.

The government had already turned the peasantry against it through its unpopular policies, such as the forcible quota system of the AMC and the resettlement and villagization programs. To the great dismay of the rural population, the army was assigned not only to round up peasants for resettlement but also to demolish their houses before moving them to new villages during the villagization program.⁴⁰ As a result, government troops were seen by the peasantry as enemies rather than as protectors of the people. As the government troops were retreating from Näfas Mäwcha to Kemer Dengay in Octo-

ber 1989, a peasant in Gayent is said to have told them: "You have destroyed our houses during the villagization process. Now God sent you an enemy that could destroy you."⁴¹

The insurgents skillfully exploited such grievances to win the support of the peasantry. During the Battle of Sheré, for instance, the TPLF received unprecedented support from the local population.⁴² Similarly, the EPRDF forces received crucial assistance from the peasantry in Gayent during the battles of Guna in late 1989 and early 1990. During the government counteroffensive in January 1990, troops are reported to have beaten up the peasants of Guna for supporting the insurgents instead of attempting to win them back.⁴³ That sort of reprisal is in fact comparable to what McCuen calls the "shot-gun approach." McCuen warns that intimidation and punishment would deprive an army of badly needed public support.⁴⁴ One could thus argue that, at the end of the day, it was primarily because the army lost the support of the population that it collapsed.

Intelligence failures

Taber, Galula, and McCuen underline the crucial importance of timely and "superior" intelligence for a counterinsurgency operation.⁴⁵ Obviously, the best sources of intelligence about insurgents are the local people. Since the clandestine organization of the rebels is usually set up at the village level, Galula says, "Each villager normally knows who the cell members are."⁴⁶

Here again, the population should be won over, protected, and humanely treated by the army. The local people should feel that the counterinsurgency operation would improve their lives. Socioeconomic reforms aimed at increasing the well-being of the local population are good strategies to win their confidence and support. Finally, every villager should feel safe to provide intelligence about the insurgents to the army.⁴⁷

The Ethiopian army, however, lost the support of the population. The local population in Eritrea and Tigray regarded the insurgents as its own children and seldom gave any intelligence to the army that might harm them. With a few exceptions, even the local agents who had been bought off were not ready to pass on to Military Intelligence sensitive information that might put the rebels in jeopardy. It was mainly due to lack of the active support of the local people that the Military Intelligence and Military Security services failed to weed out the political cells of the insurgents from the population.⁴⁸

The population not only withheld vital information from government troops but also continuously fed the insurgents tips about the army's movements and disposition. In addition, infiltration of the army and other government organizations enabled the rebels to gain an intelligence edge. As a result of such advantages, no plan of a government operation remained hidden

from the insurgents. A classified report submitted to the chief of staff corroborates that trend. In October 1989, the chief of staff reported that top military secrets were falling into the hands of the rebels before reaching government army units.⁴⁹ One of the principal factors for the undoing of the government's operations was thus the leaking of military secrets to the insurgents. Those leaks made the army vulnerable to the insurgents' onslaught and accelerated its demise.⁵⁰

Problems of command and control

Military strategists tell us that unity of command is one of the prerequisites for military victory.⁵¹ Unity of command means placing all combatants operating in a given region under the leadership of a single commander. Unity of command is one of the secrets behind Napoleon's victories. Napoleon himself underscores the indispensability of such unity. Reflecting on his experience, Napoleon says, "I should have accomplished nothing worthwhile had I been compelled to reconcile my actions with those of another."⁵²

If unity of command becomes one of the rules in a conventional war, it is even more crucial for counterinsurgency operations. Galula contends, "More than any other warfare, counterinsurgency must respect the principle of a single direction."⁵³

Unfortunately, the Ethiopian command structure under the Därg did not tolerate such a military principle. For one thing, Mängestu appeared to be deeply suspicious of the officer corps. As a result, he was not willing to grant full powers to army commanders. Although he was determined to score a military victory over the insurgents, he seemed unprepared to see the rise of a "military hero." He was obsessed with closely controlling the army. Army commanders had to get his approval to move even a brigade.⁵⁴ By the time permission was granted, it would be too late. Worse still, commanders were ordered to carry out plans of operation in which they had not taken part, in direct contradiction to accepted military principles.⁵⁵ As Napoleon once remarked, "A general who has to see things through the eyes of others will never be able to command an army as it should be commanded."⁵⁶

With the introduction of the triangular command structure, commanders were further stripped of their remaining power. That command structure forced commanders to refrain from taking initiatives even when circumstances dictated. This drawback distanced the army from another military principle cited by Galula: "Victory belongs to the camp that seizes and keeps the initiative."⁵⁷ Ironically, however, commanders were often criticized or accused of failure to take the initiative in the wake of military reverses.⁵⁸

Military setbacks could also be attributed to conflict and rivalry among commanders. That partly emanated from Mängestu's system of appointment.

He blatantly admits that commanders were appointed in such a way that they would watch out and spy on one another.⁵⁹ Besides, differences in educational background and training undermined the *esprit de corps* of the group of officers. For instance, the graduates of the Harär Military Academy are said to have showed contempt for those of Holäta. Such conflict and rivalry among commanders contributed in one way or another to the execution of Brigadier General Tariku Ayné as well as to the Sheré military disaster.⁶⁰

On the other hand, the strong hatred toward Mängestu and the opposition against his tight control over the army pushed some senior commanders not only to attempt a coup but also to sabotage the army's operations. There is now evidence indicating that some eminent army units were deliberately sent to a death trap prepared by the insurgents.⁶¹ In addition to such acts of sabotage, the high command committed serious strategic blunders that resulted in the destruction of army units. Two tragic examples are the Sheré and the Märañña disasters. In the end, all such problems in the command structure caused not only the slaughter of a great number of combatants but also the ultimate collapse of the army.⁶²

Conscription and training problems

One important factor that contributed to the Ethiopian victory over Somalia in 1978 was the drafting and deployment of hundreds of thousands of peasants after a mere three-month training at Tatäq.⁶³ Similarly, during World War II, the Soviets finally prevailed over the German forces by throwing more and more human waves into battle.⁶⁴

Once they made the shift to the Ethiopian side, Soviet military advisers were insisting that the same strategy should be applied not only against Somalia but also against the insurgents in northern Ethiopia. Reinforced by the Soviet philosophy, the Tatäq experience came to influence the government's conscription policy. Since the government attached much importance to quantity (that is, numerical superiority), it carried out a number of forceful recruitment campaigns right up to 1991. The Därg usually resorted to conscription simply because the number of volunteers was far lower than the required number of recruits. Following the introduction of the compulsory National Military Service in 1983, forceful recruitment became even more widespread than before.⁶⁵

The government did not seem to be worried about the impact of conscription on the army's performance. Studies show that draftees who join an army against their will usually lose their morale and conviction to fight. They are also more likely either to desert their units or to surrender to the enemy.⁶⁶ The Ethiopian experience was no different. Individual and group desertions from training camps as well as from various fronts were common. For example, in

1984 alone, 3,185 national servicemen were reported to have gone missing from various training centers.⁶⁷ Desertions were not limited to training camps. In November 1981, 281 soldiers from the Second and the Seventh Divisions defected to the insurgents.⁶⁸ As the war continued with no hope of victory or respite, the number of deserters rose. Between 1977 and 1986, in Eritrea alone, a total of 7,213 troops are reported to have deserted the SRA.⁶⁹

The TRA, too, suffered from desertions. Months after its creation, the TRA reported that, out of its total manpower loss, those troops identified as missing accounted for 57 percent.⁷⁰

One method of combating desertion could have been rigorous and persuasive indoctrination. Although the training program at various centers included a considerable dose of indoctrination, more emphasis was given to Marxist-Leninist theories than to patriotism. The remainder of the training time was devoted to conventional military tactics.⁷¹

It is highly unfortunate that the fundamental element of counterinsurgency warfare was missing in the training programs. Counterinsurgency experts strongly stress that government forces involved in such operations should be “thoroughly indoctrinated” to win the support of the population and get its active participation in defeating the insurgents.⁷² In the Ethiopian case, though, no such training was given to government troops. That is why, it seems, soldiers frequently committed offenses that antagonized the rural population.⁷³

Organizational weaknesses

In addition to its training deficiency, the army had organizational problems. The Ethiopian army under the Därg was a heterogeneous force. It was composed of the *Näbälbal*, paracommando, airborne, commando, special commando (Sparta), mountain infantry, regular infantry, national service, and militia units.⁷⁴

Studies show that heterogeneity in military organization may hamper unit cohesion. Defined by Stephen Crane as “a mysterious fraternity born out of smoke and danger of death,” unit cohesion is one of the essential elements that determine the morale of combatants.⁷⁵ The Ethiopian experience proved the same thing. On several occasions, frontline commanders found it difficult to maintain unit cohesion among heterogeneous groups of soldiers. For instance, well-trained units such as the airborne and the Sparta units did not want to be mixed up with other infantry forces during engagements. They did not want to be criticized for failure along with other units. They repeatedly demanded that they should be deployed independently to show their competence instead of being combined with poorly trained and less capable infantry units. Contrary to their request, the Sparta brigades, in particular, were forced to join infantry units that had already suffered manpower depletion. That cre-

ated bitter resentment among the Sparta troops and contributed to their poor performance.⁷⁶

Troops of the 103rd Commando Division, particularly the 1032nd Brigade, had similar experiences. In 1988, the 1032nd Commando Brigade was merged with the Sixth Airborne Brigade to revitalize the latter, which had suffered 90 percent manpower loss in successive battles. The members of the Commando Brigade strongly opposed the merger. But commanders turned a deaf ear to their protests. Following the merger, commandos and airborne troops began to view each other as alien fighters rather than as comrades in arms. The result was disastrous. In a one-day engagement alone (April 23, 1988), the newly merged brigade lost 710 soldiers, while the homogeneous Eighth Airborne Brigade deployed next to it suffered much lower casualties (four killed and eleven wounded). That is solid evidence showing the devastating impact on morale of merging heterogeneous units that had little or no unit cohesion.⁷⁷

Heterogeneity also affected the TRA. The ad hoc committee assigned to find out the causes for the destruction of the 604th Corps indicated that the absence of homogeneity and lack of *esprit de corps* within the TRA were some of the contributing factors to the disaster.⁷⁸

Lack of *esprit de corps* was even more evident between the militia and other army units. While admiring one's own group and undermining that of others was common among combatants, the militia had far more grievances than other army units. Although they were sharing the brunt of fighting, the militiamen were treated with contempt by the regular troops, mainly due to their illiteracy. The problem was aggravated by the government's differential treatment of the militia and regular units in terms of payment and rations. While the regulars were paid a monthly salary of 90 birr (about U.S. \$43), militiamen got only 20 birr (about U.S. \$10). Besides, unlike the regular troops, militiamen were not entitled to get freshly cooked food. The most distressing grievance was that militiamen were not given annual leave of absence to visit their families. Finally, since most of them were illiterate, they were not allowed to join military academies and become officers.⁷⁹

Since 1977, militia units had asked the government to put an end to its mistreatment. To add insult to injury, militiamen who had been on the forefront were either executed or imprisoned. It was only in July 1984 that the monthly salary of militiamen was raised to 90 birr (about U.S. \$43).⁸⁰ Even then, they were not entitled to other privileges. Consequently, militia units are reported to have performed poorly in many counterinsurgency operations. By the time a circular was issued in November 1988 allowing militiamen to be enlisted and treated as regulars, it was too late.⁸¹ The damage to their morale had already been done, and the circular had little impact on their commitment. By then, the insurgents had already snatched the strategic initiative, and the army was losing major battles.

War-weariness and disillusionment

There is probably no other human activity more stressful than combat. Soldiers involved in extended fighting normally experience combat fatigue. The extreme form of combat fatigue is a mental breakdown, which medical experts now call post-traumatic stress disorder.⁸² Research conducted on combat fatigue during World War II shows that “after as few as 100 to 200 days of combat . . . the average infantryman was [found to be] a mental and physical wreck, incapable of further performance.”⁸³

If infantrymen are unable to carry on effective combat after two hundred days, the poor performance of the Ethiopian army may not be surprising. A considerable number of infantrymen had been in foxholes for up to fourteen years. During those years, they took part in engagements ranging from brief skirmishes lasting a few hours to major operations spanning several months. Between 1977 and 1991, the two longest engagements were the war with Somalia and Operation Red Star, which lasted for 232 and 95 days, respectively.⁸⁴

Before launching Operation Red Star, the government told combatants that the campaign would stamp out the insurgency and bring about a lasting solution to the Eritrean problem. Many soldiers expected that they would go back to their villages after finishing off the rebels. But Operation Red Star failed to liquidate the insurgency. As the war dragged on for years, government troops began to feel disillusionment and war-weariness.⁸⁵

Following the failure of another major campaign, Operation Bahrä Nāgash, in late 1985, the morale of combatants further declined. The problem was more evident in the Nadāw Command than in other units. Between 1985 and 1987, the Nadāw troops were ordered to remain in their defensive positions. But making soldiers inactive was no better. As Clausewitz warns, “Passive defense is doomed to certain defeat.”⁸⁶ By early 1988, a major military reverse was in the making. On the eve of the Battle of Afabēt, the morale of the Nadāw troops was at an all-time low. When the EPLF mounted its major offensive on March 17, 1988, it met little resolute resistance. As a result, it captured Afabēt within forty-eight hours.⁸⁷

The destruction of the Nadāw Command brought about far-reaching consequences. Not only did it shatter the morale of government troops but also it greatly affected Ethiopian-Soviet relations. For the first time, three Soviet military advisers fell into EPLF hands, and another lost his life at Afabēt.⁸⁸ That was not, however, the main reason that resulted in a change in Soviet policy. The fundamental factor was the new policy introduced by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who eased cold war tensions, Bahru underscores, by “effectively terminating the role of his country as a world power.”⁸⁹ Gorbachev was no longer willing to supply arms to Ethiopia. When personally asked by Māngestu for the delivery of military hardware during his July 1988

visit to the Kremlin, Gorbachev remained adamant in his refusal to resume his country's role as a major supplier of arms. Instead, he advised Māngestu to "seek a nonmilitary solution" to the war.⁹⁰

Māngestu's unsuccessful visit to Moscow was later followed by other frustrating military reversals, the major ones being the Sheré disaster and the TRA's retreat to Wollo. These military reversals dealt a heavy blow to the morale and discipline of government troops.⁹¹

Thereafter, scary reports about the deterioration of discipline and morale among combatants began to reach the MOND. One such report reveals that more than half of the troops were retreating from battles without firing a shot.⁹² Another report that assessed the army's tactical weaknesses on various fronts summarizes the grim reality as follows:

The retreat which is being practiced by the army is not tactical. It is rather a mass flight. Heavy weapons should have been destroyed just before retreat. But the army is leaving them behind intact to the enemy. Most of the weapons now being used by the rebels were left behind by the army. The rebels are now given tanks and antiaircraft guns with adequate ammunition.⁹³

Worried by the worsening military situation, Brigadier General Telahun Argaw, commander of the 605th Corps, reported that, due to war-weariness and the decline of morale, combatants were unable not only to mount offensives but also to defend themselves.⁹⁴ Likewise, in May 1990, the 603rd Corps reported that the feeling of war-weariness and hopelessness was so widespread that soldiers were waiting for an opportune moment to disappear from the war front.⁹⁵

The government itself spread the insurgents' propaganda among its own troops by redeploying former POWs. Such former POWs were the first to flee or surrender. The other war-weary and demoralized troops would follow suit.⁹⁶

Concomitant to war-weariness and low morale were increasing disciplinary problems. Random shooting, looting, and rape became more frequent as the army approached its doom.⁹⁷

In conclusion, the strategic and institutional problems of the army were so chronic that they enormously undermined its strength and sapped its morale. As Gebru maintains, a couple of years before its final disintegration, the military had already been "a hollow colossus" plagued by internal problems.⁹⁸ An army general puts it this way: "If we have thoroughly examined these internal problems, instead of asking why the army miserably failed to achieve victory, we would be inclined to enquire how the army could survive so long!"⁹⁹ A critical examination of the turmoil the army was in and the multifaceted problems it encountered would make it difficult to accept the thesis that it lost the

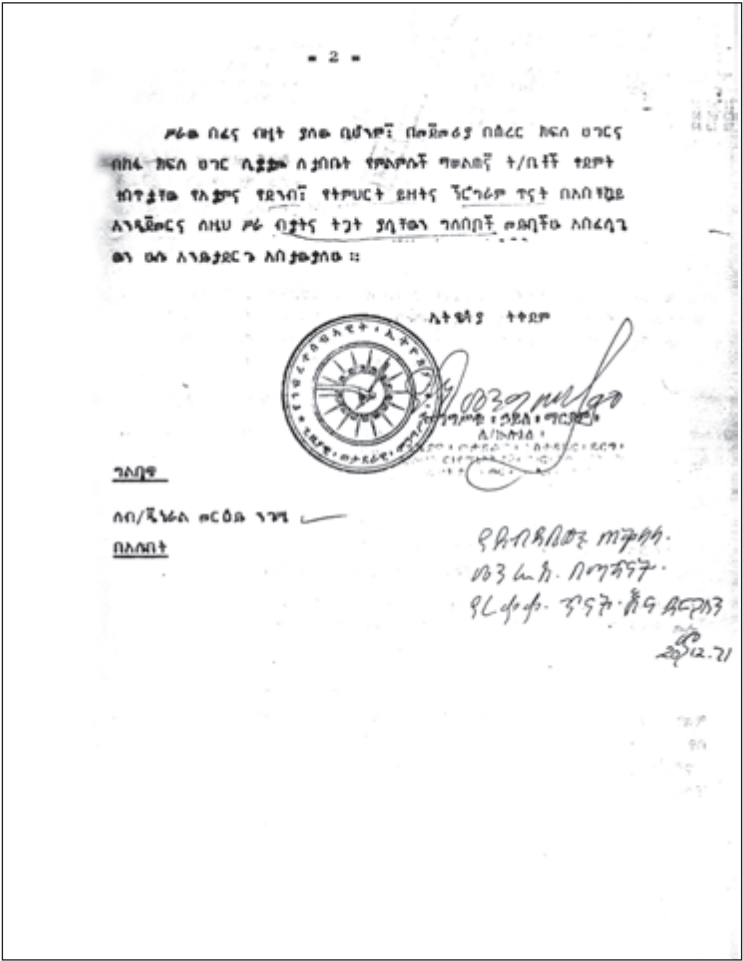
war because it was less heroic or less courageous than the insurgents. On the other hand, it could also be argued that the rebels finally prevailed primarily because they had the support of the population and superior intelligence in addition to more determined fighters and commanders.¹⁰⁰

Letter from the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces to the Minister of Defense Regarding the Critical Shortage of Rations for Soldiers

[illegible]

Letter from the Head of State Mängestu H. Maryam to the Minister
of Defense Regarding the Importance of Education and
Manpower Organization in the Military





Letter from Brigadier General Rägassa Jimma to the Vice Minister of Defense Regarding the Shortage of Military Vehicles



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6- ወርቅ ለጣጣጥ የጣጣጥ ተሽጋርባቶች ይገኛል ለጣጣጥ

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7- በአጠቃላይ ከገፍቶች ይገኛል ከገፍቶች መልክ 9696 ልቀ ልቀ

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የሕይወት ጉዳዮች
የሕይወት ጉዳዮች
የሕይወት ጉዳዮች
የሕይወት ጉዳዮች

Letter from the Deputy Commander of the SRA to the Chief of Staff
of the Armed Forces Regarding the Urgent Need to Replace
Private Vehicles with Government Trucks

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2.3 አባዛና ያቼ መከናወን ከባድ በተገኘ ብድር የተገዙ ሲሆኑ ገንዘብ አገኝተው ዕዳቸውን በላይከፍሎ ወለቱን እየመረባቸው ባንቡ በፍርድ ቤት እየከበባቸው በፍርድ አገልግሎት የተወሰነባቸው መከናወን ያጥቃሉ ስላሉ ፡፡

3. ከላይ በተገለጹት የፍ ምርመራ ሌሎች የታዩትን ምርመራዎች በገንዘብ ላይ ሊመዘገቡ በባለቤቱ የሚከተሉትን እየፈለጉ ነው ፡፡

3.1 የረቀቀ ተግባር አሥራ በደረሰና ጋራዝ ከገቡ በኋላ ተከታታይ በሰበሰቡት እናበራለን በሚለው አባባል በፍርድ ቤት በጋራዝ ውስጥ የሚቀዳ ስላሉ ፡፡

3.2 ወደ አሥራ ከገቡ በኋላ ተፈላጊው ሊገኝ በሚችሉ ቦታዎች ይደረጋል ፡፡

3.3 አንዳንዶች መከናወን ወይም በሚታዩት አገልግሎት ሌላ ሥራ ተቀብረው አገልግሎት ይገባቸዋል ፡፡

3.4 በአጠቃላይ በገንዘብ ላይ ሊመዘገቡ የተለያዩ ምርመራዎች ያቀርባሉ ፡፡

4. በዚህም የተነሳ እነዚህን መከናወን ለማስፈራት በገንዘብ ፋይል የታዩ ዘመን የምርመራ ሰነድ ሲሆን በተገኘ ሁኔታ አባባልን ማሟላት አስቻላቸው ፡፡

5. ይህንን ጥገና ለማድረግ አባባል አጠቃላይ ሁኔታዎች የሚያመሩ በተደጋ ጋራ ስራን ተሰጥቶ በፍርድ ቤት በሚገኝ የፍርድ ቤት የተከፈለበት በመገንጠል መከናወን መለወጥ ነው ፡፡ ይህንን አግራጭ ስራን ከአፍት ወር

በፊት ያቀረበ ሲሆን በመከላከያ ሚኒስቴር በኩል መረጃው የፍትሕ ተገቢ ሲሆን

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APPENDIX V

Letter from the Head of Logistics of the SRA to the Head
of Logistics of the Ministry of Defense Requesting the
Transportation of Provisions by Air to the Army in Eritrea

[illegible]

Letter from the Minister of Internal Affairs to the
Minister of Defense Regarding the Infiltration
of the Army by Eritrean Insurgents

[illegible]

Circular from the Minister of Defense to All Army Units
Announcing the Execution of Brigadier General Tariku Ayne

$$hQ_6 := 4 \cdot 78$$

ጉዳዩ ፡-- በሰርዳቅ ፅዝን ስር ከሀዘን የተሰጠ ፖሊስ ቁጥር ፲

ጌታ በ/ጌጌራ ታሪክ ፻፩ ከጥር ፲ ቀን ፲፱፻፱ ደዋር አስከሰህ
ደረሰ የሰርዳቅ ፅዝን በጋሳፊነትና በአዘዥነት እጭሩ ለመሥራት ላይ ጭቶ
የለ ።

ጌታ በፅድቅ ክልል ሥራ ጭን ከፀጠረበት ጊዜ ደዋር በአጠራር አካ
ላት ጋር ያለመገባባት የሚፈጥሩ ሲሆን ፤ ለዚህም ተደጋጋሚ ዋጎች ከሰጠው
አጠራር አካላት ተጠጋይተዋል ።

በሰርዳቅ ፅዝን ገንባር ለመሥራት ያላቸው ፍላጎት በጥቅም የተሰጠ
የሚታይ ከመሆኑም በላይ በአጭር ወቅት ይደረግ ሆኖ ለመሥራት ይህም
ካልተሰጠ በሰርዳቅ ለመገለል እንደሚፈለጉ ሲታይ በፀጠረው ሰው ካልተ
ሞከረ በዚህ ለመሰናበት እንደሚፈለጉ በአሁኑ ሰራተኛዎች ።

በአጠራር ጭ ላይ የፀጠረው ደመወዝ የገንዘብ አገልግሎት በሃይማኖት
የሚታይ ከመሆኑም ይህም ደመወዝ በርካታ ተርፍ የሚያስገኝ መሆኑ ሲታይ ፤
በሰርዳቅ ዘንድ በዘመን እንደሚገኝ መገለጽ ይገባል ።

ከዚህም በላይ በሰርዳቅ ፅዝን ገንባር የሚገኝ ጊዜ አገልግሎት
ለሥነ-ሥርዓት የማይገኝ የተርብ አለቃ ጭን የሚገኝ ለመሆኑም
በጊዜው ዋጎች የሚገኝ የሚታይ ከመሆኑም በላይ በተደጋጋሚ በጥጥር
ሥር እየሞት በመፈረሻው ጥበቃ ተጓዥ ላይ ይገኛል መሆኑም በጥሪ
ፅድቅ ።

የደብዳቤው ቁጥር ፲፱፻፱
የደብዳቤው ቁጥር ፲፱፻፱
የደብዳቤው ቁጥር ፲፱፻፱

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NOTES

Introduction

The designation E.C. on a source means that the date is from the Ethiopian calendar, which is the principal system of organizing days, months, and years in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian calendar has thirteen months—twelve months of thirty days each and a thirteenth month with five or six days. The year on the Ethiopian calendar differs by seven or eight years from that used in Europe and the Americas because of a different way of calculating dates in the lifetime of Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian new year begins on *Mäskäräm* 1 (September 11). Between *Mäskäräm* 1 and *Tahsas* 30 (January 8), one must add seven years to get the western calendar. For the remaining months, eight years are added to convert the year to the western calendar. For example, *Mäskäräm* 2006 E.C. means September 2013, and *Sänè* 2006 E.C. is equivalent to June 2014.

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79. FO 371/35615, 29, 40–41, 101, 161.

80. Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 106–8, 111–12.

81. Komon Skordiles, *Kagnew: The Story of the Ethiopian Fighters in Korea* (Tokyo: Radio Press, 1954), xi, 47, 79, 115.

82. Ibid., xiii; Tekeste, “The 1960 Coup d’État in Ethiopia,” 18–28; see also Dereje Tekle, “The History of the Qagnew Battalions in Korea” (bachelor’s thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1993); Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), 360.

83. MOND Archives, Administration File No. 412(B), Congo Yāzāmātāw Yā Tāqell Brigade Kefloch [Units of the Tāqell Brigade sent to the Congo], 1952 E.C.

84. Lefever, 149–50.

85. MOND Archives, Intelligence File No. 017; see also Paul B. Henze, *Rebels and Separatists: Regional Resistance to a Marxist Regime* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1985), 26–27; Patrick Gilkes, *Conflict in Somalia and Ethiopia* (Turin, Italy: Wayland Publishers, 1994), 9, 11; Korn, 2; Negussay Ayele, “Somalia’s Relations with Her Neighbours: From ‘Greater Somalia’ to ‘Western Somalia’ to Somali Refugees to . . .,” in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, edited by Sven Rubenson (Uppsala, Sweden: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1982), 659–60.

86. MOND Archives, Intelligence File No. 230, Operation Mābrāq [Operation Lightning], 29/3/57 E.C. (December 8, 1964); Operation File No. 186, Defense of the Ogadén, July 1966.

87. Robert G. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa: The Diplomacy of Intervention and Disengagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 55; Korn, 2–3; Nigussie, 663.

88. MOND Archives, Administration 122(A), Lt. Gen. Märe'd Mängäsha to Lt. Gen. Isayyas G. Sellasé, 19/7/56 E.C. (March 28, 1964).

89. Shumet Sishagne, "Power Struggle in the Eritrean Secessionist Movement" (master's thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1984).

90. Shumet Sishagne, "Discord and Fragmentation in Eritrean Politics 1941–1981" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1992).

91. MOND Archives, Administration 122(A), Lt. Gen. Käbbädä Gabré to Lt. Gen. Märe'd Mängäsha, 30/6/56 E.C. (March 9, 1964).

92. MOND Archives, Administration 122(A), Br. Gen. Jagama Kéllo to Lt. Gen. Isayyas G. Sellasé, 29/6/57 E.C. (March 8, 1964).

93. MOND Archives, Administration File Nos. 716–717, Second Division Commander to MOND, 29/6/57 E.C.

94. MOND Archives, Administration File No. 409, Yä 1959 Yä Zämächanna Yä Märäja Report [The 1966–1967 Operation and Intelligence Report].

95. Ibid.

96. Gebru, *Ethiopia*, 147–48, 183–84; W. Sellasé Bäräka and Jagama Kéllo.

97. Shumet (1984), 34; Henze, "Arming the Horn 1960–1980," 655; Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay*, 321; Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974–1987: A Transformation from Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 27.

98. MOND Archives, Administration File No. 122(B), Ras Asratä Kassa to Šāhafē Tezaz Aklilu H. Wold, 7/6/61 E.C. (February 15, 1964).

99. MOND Archives, Operation File No. 325(B), Br. Gen. John Collins to Lt. Gen. Käbbädä Gäbré, 14/2/72 E.C.

100. Korn, 3; Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (London: Verso, 1981), 75.

101. MOND Archives, Operations File Nos. 325(A) and 325(B), Yä Zämächa Report [Report of Operation], 1963–1965 E.C.

Chapter Two

1. Gännät Ayyälä, *Yä Létäna Colonel Mängestu H. Maryam Tezetawoch [Recollections of Lieutenant Colonel Mängestu H. Maryam]* (Addis Ababa: Mega Publishing House, 1994 E.C.), 255.

2. Ibid., 276.

3. Ottaway and Ottaway, 87–88, 93–96, 156, 163; MOND Archives, Operations 518B, Yä Somalia Mängest Worära Atäqalay Zägäba [A Comprehensive Report of the Somalia Invasion], 1966–1971 E.C., 3–7.

4. MOND, Administration 5827, Selä Nābälbal Tor [About the Nābälbal Force], 1–2.

5. Ibid., Märdasa Lélisa.

6. MOND, Administration 5827, 1–4.

7. Ibid., 1, 5; for a few weeks, the 205th Nābälbal Battalion joined the Gäset force in its march from Gondär to Humära to annihilate EDU insurgents.

8. Ibid., Märdasa Lélisa.

9. Ibid.

10. Abbäbä W. Maryam.

11. Kasayé Chāmāda, *Yä Tor Méda Welowoch: Kā Mesraq Eskā Sāmén'* [*Battlefield Reminiscences from the East to the North*] (Addis Ababa: Beranna Printing Enterprise, 1999 E.C.), 122.

12. Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 62.

13. Taddäsä Tele, *Yä Anabest Meder: Yä Etyopya Särawit Yä Tarik Zägäba* [*Land of Lions: A Historical Record of the Ethiopian Army*] (Addis Ababa: Roma Printing Press, 1999 E.C.), 158–59, 186, 276; Abbäbä W. Maryam and Gezaw Bälaynäh.

14. René Lefort, *Ethiopie: La révolution hérétique* (Paris: François Maspero, 1981), 296.

15. Taddäsä, *Ya Anabest Meder*, 158–59, 186, 276; Märdasa Lélisa.

16. MOND Archives (Harär), National Revolutionary Operations HQ to all administrative regions, 9/1/70 E.C. (September 19, 1977).

17. Taddäsä, *Ya Anabest Meder*, 158–59, 186, 276.

18. Täsfayé H. Maryam.

19. Ibid., MOND Archives, Operations 518B, 21.

20. Märdasa Lélisa, Bähaylu Kendé, and Täsfayé H. Maryam.

21. MOND, Administration 380, Mängestu H. Maryam to Ministry of National Defense, 14/12/71 E.C. (August 20, 1979).

22. Märdasa Lélisa, Negatu Bogalä, Mulu Sahlé, and Damtāw Gétahun.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Tedla Bekele, “Some Internal Causes for the Defeat of the 39th Mountain Infantry Brigade in the Northern Front 1981–1991” (bachelor’s thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1993).

26. MOND, Operations 704, Yä Mesraq Ez Zāmācha Report [Operations Report of the Eastern Command], 1973 E.C., 3–4; for further discussion, see Gebru Tāreke, “Operation Lash: A Successful Response to Insurgency,” *Horn of Africa* 19 (2001): 100–116.

27. MOND, Operations 040, Br. Gen. Asrat Berru to Chief of Staff, 25/6/73 E.C. (March 4, 1981); Mulu Sahlé and Damtāw Gétahun.

28. MOND Archives, Administration 3102C, NMS (National Military Service) HQ to MOND, 16/10/73 E.C. (June 23, 1981).

29. Gännät, 239; Wubātu Şäggayé and Märdasa Lélisa.

30. MOND Archives, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät Yä Zāmācha Report [A Ten-Year Operations Report], 1977 E.C., 21–23.

31. Täsfayé H. Maryam, *Yä Tor Méda Melo* [*Battlefield Reminiscences*] (Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1997 E.C.), 259.

32. Ibid., 259–60.

33. MOND, Administration 137A, Näqāmt Hospital to Ground Forces HQ, 10/11/73 E.C. (July 17, 1981).

34. Täsfayé H. Maryam and Nägga Mulaw.

35. Ibid.

36. See Appendix VII.

37. Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 109.

38. MOND, Administration 2392, NMSCDD [National Military Service and Civil Defense Department] to MOND, 3/11/77 E.C. (July 10, 1985).

39. MOND, Administration 2392, Br. Gen. Afāworq W. Mikaél to Maj. Gen. Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, 25/10/77 E.C. (July 2, 1985).

40. MOND, Administration 2392, NMSCDD to Chief of Staff, 25/10/77 E.C.

41. MOND, Administration 3701, NMSCDD to Administration, Organization and Mobilization Main Department, 21/9/76 E.C. (May 29, 1984).

42. MOND, Administration 2392, Br. Gen. Afāworq G. Mikaél to Maj. Gen. Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, 25/10/77 E.C.; Administration 4627, Yä Abyotawi Tor Hayloch Atäqalay Yä Zämächa Report [A Comprehensive Operations Report of the Revolutionary Armed Forces], 1977–1979 E.C.

43. Bahru, “The Military and Militarism in Africa,” 288.

44. Negatu Bogalä and Täsfayé H. Maryam.

45. MOND, Administration 4627, Yä Abyotawi Tor Hayloch Atäqalay Yä Zämächa Report, 1–4.

46. Molla Assäfa, Gäbräyäs W. Giorgis, and Mohammäd Säyed.

47. Ibid.

48. MOND, Administration 747, Ya 103 Commando Keflä Tor Yä Säw Hayl [The Manpower of the 103rd Commando Division], 1980 E.C., 7; Şägga Mogäs, ‘Mäkälakäya Särawitu Lämen Wädäqä? Yä Yebab Iyäasu Commando Tenses [Why Did the Defense Force Collapse? The Origin of the Commando Unit at Yebab Iyäsus], *Tobyä* 3, no. 3, 1987 E.C., 13–14.

49. Ibid.

50. Şägga, 14, 40.

51. Taddäsä T. Haymanot, Nägash Eshätu, Tayyé Berhanu, and Kasayé Chamäda; see also Kasayé, 262, 279.

52. MOND, Administration 5269, Project Spartakiad–81, 1. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Soviet Union was excluded from the Olympic Games by the capitalist states. The Soviets reacted by holding their own games named “Spartakiad.” The Soviets derived the term from the name of a slave, Spartacus, who led a revolt against his Roman masters. Displays of mass gymnastics in Czechoslovakia and Albania during the Communist era were also called Spartakiad.

53. Ibid.

54. MOND, Administration 1713, Yä 1/81/3 Leyu Commando Brigade Amätawi Report [An Annual Report of the 1/81/3 Special Commando Brigade], Nähasé, 1982 E.C., 6.

55. MOND, Administration 5269, Project Spartakiad–81, 6.

56. Ibid., 7.

57. MOND, Operations 100, Yä Project Spartakiad 81–2 Seltäna [The Training of the 81–2 Spartakiad], 1; Operations 644, Leyu Commando Brigedoch Yägätämachäw Woqtawi Chegeroch [The Current Problems Facing the Special Commando Brigades], Hämlé, 1982 E.C., 10.

58. MOND, Operations 644, Leyu Commando Brigedoch Yägätämachäw Woqtawi Chegeroch, 3, 10.

59. MOND, Administration and Finance 187, Mängestu H. Maryam to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 9/2/82 E.C. (October 19, 1989).

60. MOND Operations 159, Bä Project 1/83 Endiqätär Yätäfäqädä Mädäbäna Särawit [Regular Forces to Be Employed by Project 1/83], 1983 E.C.

61. Täsfayé H. Maryam; MOND Archives, Operations 532, Br. Gen. Gétanäh

Haylé to Chief of Staff, 13/8/83 E.C.; NMSCDD to Operations Department, 28/7/83 E.C. (April 6, 1991).

62. “Armed Forces,” in *Ethiopia: A Country Study*, Library of Congress Country Studies (1991), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/ettoc.html>.

63. Berouk Mesfin, “The Role of Military Power in Ethiopia’s National Security 1974–1991” (master’s thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2002).

64. MOND, Administration 3381, Operations Main Department to Chief of Staff, 15/1/78 E.C. (September 25, 1985).

65. MOND, Administration 3384, Maj. Gen. Märe’d Negussé to Defense Minister, 13/1/81 E.C. (September 23, 1988).

66. MOND, Logistics 755, Education Main Department to Logistics Department, 3/8/82 E.C. (April 11, 1990).

67. MOND, Administration 2058A, Lt. Gen. Täsfayé G. Kidan to Chief of Staff, 30/8/78 E.C. (May 8, 1986).

68. Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 152–53.

69. Dawit, 36, 38.

70. Korn, 145; John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Nottingham, U.K.: Russell Press, 1978), 171.

71. *Ibid.*

72. Dawit, 34.

73. Kasayé, 73–74, 97.

74. Patman, 218–19.

75. *Ibid.*; see also Bruce D. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars 1945–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 185.

76. Patman, 221; Porter, 185.

77. Patman, 223; Abbäbä W. Maryam and Wasihun Negatu.

78. Patman, 233; Gebru, *Ethiopia*, 659.

79. MOND, Operations 518B, Appendix III.

80. “Foreign Military Assistance: The Soviet Union,” in *A Country Study: Ethiopia*, Library of Congress Country Studies (1991), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/ettoc.html>.

81. Gännät, 253–54.

82. MOND, Finance 103, Military Equipment Delivered to MOND of PDRE [People’s Democratic Republic of Ethiopia] 1974–1991, September 1991, 1.

83. MOND, Finance 182, Agreement Between the PMAC [Provisional Military Administrative Council] and the U.S.S.R. on Granting Credit for Socialist Ethiopia, 6/3/87 E.C.; Finance 182, Agreement Between the PDRE and the U.S.S.R. on Deliveries of Special Equipment, June 14, 1988. The Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and the Somali National Movement (SNM) were created in 1978 and 1982, respectively, with Ethiopian support to wage guerrilla warfare against the Somali government. In addition to Ethiopia, Libya and South Yemen were supplying arms to the SSDF and the SNM.

84. MOND, Administration 842A, V. Zinovkin, U.S.S.R. Economic Affairs Counselor to Minister of Defense, 28/10/87 E.C.

85. MOND, Administration 5807, Zeqetäña Waga Bämaqräb Yätämärätu Haga-roch [Those Countries Selected for Submitting Lower Price], 1.

86. MOND, Finance 103, Military Equipment Supplied Free of Charge, 1991, 8.

87. MOND, Finance 103, Military Equipment Deliveries 1974, 1990, June 1990, 1–2. The abbreviations for the Soviet-made weapons can be translated as follows: AK (*avtomat Kalashnikova*), Kalashnikov automatic rifle; AKM (*avtomat Kalashnikova modernizirovannyi*), Kalashnikov automatic rifle modernized; RPD (*ruchnoi pulemet Degtyaryova*), handheld Degtyaryov machine gun; RPK (*ruchnoi pulemet Kalashnikov*), handheld Kalashnikov machine gun; PKM (*pulemet Kalashnikova modernizirovannyi*), modernized Kalashnikov machine gun; PKS (*pulemet Kalashnikova stankovyyi*), mounted Kalashnikov machine gun; DShK (*Degtyaryova-Shpagina krupnokalibernyyi*), Degtyaryov-Shpagin large caliber; ZPU (*zenitnaya pulemëtnaya ustanovka*), mounted antiaircraft machine gun; SKS (*samozaryadnyy karabin sistemy Simonova*), Simonov system self-loading carbine; PPSH (*pistolet pulemet Shpagina*), Shpagin submachine gun; and PPS (*pistolet pulemet Sudaeva*), Sudaev submachine gun.

88. Ibid. *Ch'onma-ho* in the North Korean language means *flying horse*.

89. Ibid., 9–10. The abbreviations for the Soviet-made weapons can be translated as follows: ZiS (*zavod imeni Stalina*), factory named for Stalin; ZU (*zenitnaya ustanovka*), mounted antiaircraft; and ZSU (*zenitnaya samokhodnaya ustanovka*), self-propelled mounted antiaircraft.

90. MOND, Operations 168, Kā Qāy Kokāb Eskā Bahrā Nāgash [From Red Star to Bahrā Nāgash], 1978 E.C., 1–5. Throughout the Därg period, \$1 U.S. was exchanged for 2.07 birr.

91. MOND, Operations 168, Kā Qāy Kokāb Eskā Bahrā Nāgash, 5–8.

92. Marc Fontrier, *La chute de la junte militaire éthiopienne 1987–1991* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1999), 137; Taddäsä, *Ya Anabest Meder*, 364–66.

93. Gännät, 277.

94. Gebru Tāreke, “From Af Abet to Shire: The Defeat and Demise of Ethiopia's ‘Red’ Army 1988–89,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 42, no. 2 (June 2004): 242; “Foreign Military Assistance: The Soviet Union,” in *A Country Study: Ethiopia*.

95. MOND, Operation 493, Yāwädämu Enna Yätäfu Wanna Wanna Mäsariyawoch [Major Weapons Destroyed and Lost], 1967–1981 E.C., 1.

96. Fontrier, 197.

97. Ibid., 222–25; “Regime Stability and Peace Negotiation,” in *Ethiopia: A Country Study*.

98. Bahru, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, 267.

99. Fontrier, 202–5.

100. MOND, Finance 182, Bājemmer Lay Yallu Enna Ketetel Yämiyasfälegachāw Serawoch [Ongoing Activities That Need Follow-Up], 28/10/81 E.C. (July 5, 1989), 1.

101. MOND, Administration 754B, Yä Hagār Mākälakāyan Yä Tor Tetq Felagot Lāmanuwalat Yätädärägä Tenat [A Study Conducted to Fulfill the MOND's Needs for Arms], Mäskäräm, 1981 E.C., 17.

102. Ibid., 18.

103. Ibid., 20–21.

104. Ibid., 24.

105. MOND, Operations 493, Operations Department to Chief of Staff, 15/8/82 E.C. (April 23, 1990).

106. MOND, Operations 513–514, Maj. Gen. Kenfä Gabre'l Denqu to Operations Department, 5/12/82 E.C. (August 11, 1990).

Chapter Three

1. MOND Archives, Administration 2673, Yä Meder Tor Yäsaw Hayl Miyazya [Manpower of the Ground Forces], 1982 E.C., 1
2. Negatu Bogalä, Kasayé Chämäda, and Wubätu Şäggayé.
3. Jagama Kéllo, W. Sellasé Bäräka, and Gezaw Bälayanäh.
4. MOND, Administration 5821, Selä Näbälbal Tor [About the Näbälbal Force], 1–2.
5. Märdasa Lélisa and Täsfayé H. Maryam.
6. MOND, Administration 5827, Selä Näbälbal Tor, 5.
7. MOND, Operations 518B, File No. 518B, Adhariw Yä Somalia Mängest Selakahédäben Gelş Wärära Atäqalay Zägäba 1966–1971 [A Comprehensive Report of the Flagrant Invasion Carried Out by the Reactionary Somali Government 1966–1971 E.C.], 1971 E.C., 12–13, 18–19.
8. MOND, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät Yä Zämächa Report, 6.
9. Gezaw Bälaynäh, Abbäbä W. Maryam, and Märdasa Lélisa. The Därg went straight from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Division by skipping the Thirteenth, probably because the number 13 was associated with bad luck. Throughout the Därg period, there was no Thirteenth Division.
10. MOND, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hagär Bä Hua'sä Yä Täfäşämu Wotadärawi Enqesqaséwoch [Military Activities Carried Out by the SRA (Second Revolutionary Army) in Eritrea], 8.
11. Märdasa Lélisa; MOND, Administration 3102C, NMS Civil Defense Main Department to MOND, 16/10/73 E.C. (June 23, 1981).
12. MOND, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät Yä Zämächa Report, 15–16, 18, 22.
13. Ibid., 15.
14. MOND, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hagär Bä Hua'sä Yä Täfäşämu Wotadärawi Enqesqaséwoch, 15.
15. MOND Archives, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät Yä Zämächa Report, 21–22.
16. Ibid., 25–27. While Mänter came into existence as a new force, the Weqaw Command was dissolved in March 1984 due to the heavy casualties it suffered when the EPLF captured Algéna.
17. MOND, Administration 2634, Administration, Organization, and Mobilization Department to MOND, 18/10/77 E.C. (June 25, 1985); Administration 137A, Br. Gen. Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam to Lt. Col. Täsfayé H. Maryam, 4/9/73 E.C. (May 12, 1981).
18. MOND, Administration 2634, Br. Gen. Abbäbä W. Maryam to Logistics Main Department, 2/7/77 E.C. (March 11, 1985).
19. MOND, Administration 5840, Ya 1977 Zämächa Report [The 1977 Operations Report], 1977 E.C., 1–2.
20. MOND, Administration 5829, 605th Corps to TRA, 6/12/80 E.C. (August 12, 1988).
21. MOND, Operations 168, Yä Huasä Zämächawoch [Operations of the SRA], 1978 E.C., 1–5.
22. MOND, Administration 747, Yä Sementu Ezoch Yäsaw Hayl [Manpower of the Eight Commands], Hedar, 1980 E.C., 1.

23. Ibid.
24. MOND, Administration 747, Yä Aratu Ezoch Yäsaw Hayl [Manpower of the Four Commands], Hämlé, 1980 E.C., 1. Here, again, the government omitted the number 613 due to superstitious association of the number 13 with bad luck.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.; Negatu Bogalä.
27. MOND, Operation 060, Ba 603 Kor Genbar Yätädärägä Wegiya [The Fighting That Took Place on the 603rd Corps's Front], 16/6/83–5/7/83 E.C. (February 23, 1991–March 14, 1991), 1–4.
28. Täsfayé H. Maryam and Märdasa Lélisa.
29. MOND, Administration 747, Yä Sementu Ezoch Yäsaw Hayl, 1.
30. MOND, Administration 3701, Yä Inspection Buden Yä Sera Mämäriya [Guidelines of the Inspection Team's Duties], 1.
31. MOND, Administration 795, Yä Meder Tor Derejetawi Mäwaqer [Organizational Structure of the Ground Forces], 1.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. MOND, Administration 5375, Selä Nurse Mäkonenoch Yätädärägä Tenat [A Study Conducted About Nurse Officers], 3.
35. MOND, Administration 5822, Yä Mähandis Gedaj Afäşaşäm [The Execution of a Combat Engineer's Mission], 1–2.
36. Wasihun Negatu and Märdasa Lélisa.
37. MOND, Operations 011, Yä Mägänaña Kefl Tägbar [Duties of the Communication Unit], 6.
38. MOND, Operations 060, Ba 603 Kor Genbar Yätädärägä Wegiya, 1–5; Administration 1212A, Bä So'asa Genbar Yämigañ Yäsaw Hayl [Manpower Found on the TRA's Front], 1983 E.C., 1.
39. MOND, Operations 011, Yä Commando Keflä Tor Aquam [Organization of a Commando Division], 9; Operations 096, Yä Ayär Woläd Keflä Tor Aquam [Organization of an Airborne Division], 1; Administration 5269, Project Spartakiad–81, 1.
40. Thomas M. Kane, *Military Logistics and Strategic Performance* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 1–2.
41. Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 231.
42. Ibid., 200.
43. P. D. Foxton, *Powering War: Modern Land Force Logistics* (London: Brassey's, 1994), 9.
44. Brehon B. Somervell, "United States Army Services of Supply," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 20, no. 2 (January 1943), <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1172835162>.
45. See for instance MOND, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät Yä Zämächa Report, 5–10.
46. Abbäbä W. Maryam.
47. MOND, Administration 971, Yä Derejet Mämriya Halafinat Enna Tägbar [Duties and Responsibilities of the Logistics Department], 1.
48. MOND, Administration 971, Yä Derejet Enna Gänzäb Meketel Minister Mäwaqer [Structure of the Vice Minister for Logistics and Finance], 1.

49. Abbäbä W. Maryam.
50. Ibid.
51. MOND, Administration 1406, Purchasing Department to Distribution Department, 4/9/74 E.C. (May 12, 1982).
52. MOND, Administration 740, Br. Gen. Bädlu Duki to Maj. Gen. Abbäbä W. Maryam, 25/9/80 E.C. (June 2, 1988); Administration 1472, Ya Soasä Yä Logistics Degaf [Logistical Support of the TRA], Genbot, 1980 E.C.
53. MOND, Administration 740, Ground Forces Food Administration to the Purchasing Department, 25/9/80 E.C. (June 2, 1988).
54. MOND, Operations 168, Yä 15ña Egräña Shaläqa Yä Wegiya Tarik [History of the Combat of the Fifteenth Infantry Battalion], 1/12/71 E.C. (August 7, 1979), 1–4.
55. Ibid., 4–7.
56. MOND, Operations 518B, Adhariw Yä Somalia Mängest Selakahédäben Gelş Wärära Atäqalay Zägäba, 7.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 8–9, 30–43.
59. MOND, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hagär Bä Hua'sä Yä Täfäşämu Wotadärawi Enqesqaséwoch, 8–11.
60. Gebru Tareke, "Operation Lash: A Successful Response to Insurgency," *Horn of Africa* 19 (2001): 103.
61. MOND, Operations 704, Yä Mesraq Ez Yä 1973 Yä Zämächa Report [Operations Report of the Eastern Command for the Year 1973 E.C.], 3–4.
62. Gebru, "Operation Lash," 109.
63. MOND, Operations 704, Yä Mesraq Ez Yä 1973 Yä Zämächa Report, 4–5.
64. MOND, Operations 040, Br. Gen. Asrat Berru to Chief of Staff, 25/6/73 E.C. (March 4, 1981).
65. Abbäbä W. Maryam.
66. MOND, Administration 3842, Kä Zämächa Mämriya Yätäwäsädä Yä Elät Hunéta Report [Daily Situation Report Taken from the Operations Department], 16/6/74 E.C. (February 23, 1982), 1–2; Abbäbä W. Maryam.
67. Ibid.
68. MOND, Administration 2747, Yä Weqaw Ez Yä Fetäsha Report [Inspection Report of the Weqaw Command], 29/8/74 E.C. (May 7, 1982), 1–5.
69. Ibid.
70. MOND, Operations 044, Yä Elät Hunéta Report [Daily Situation Report], 14–15/6/74 E.C. (February 21–22, 1982), 1.
71. Ibid.
72. See Appendix VIII.
73. Ibid.
74. MOND, Administration 2058A, Yä Abyotawi Särawit Yä Qäläb Gefit [The Revolutionary Army's Food Transportation], Tahsas, 1977 E.C., 1–4.
75. MOND, Administration 4649, Bä Sämén Tor Genbar Yä Huasä Abey Kenwanéwoch [Main Accomplishments of the SRA on the Northern Front], 1977 E.C., 1.
76. MOND, Administration 020B, SRA's Budget and Finance Department to SRA's Logistics Department, 9/6/77 E.C. (February 16, 1985); SRA's Budget and Finance to Maj. Gen. Rägga Jimma, 18/10/77 E.C. (June 25, 1985).

77. MOND, Administration 786, SRA Commander to Chief of Staff, 27/9/82 E.C. (June 4, 1990).

78. MOND, Administration 020A, SRA's Logistics Department to the Inspector General, 2/3/79 E.C. (November 11, 1986).

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95. The monument erected in Addis Ababa (inaugurated on December 17, 2007) to commemorate Cuban troops who died during the Somali-Ethiopian war displays the names and photographs of those 163 men.

96. MOND Archives, Administration 5385, MOND to Col. Täsfayé W. Sellasé, 17/08/80 E.C. (April 25, 1988).

97. MOND Archives, Administration 5385, ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] Visits to Ethiopian and Somali POWs, November 1987.

98. MOND Archives (Harär), 23; Operations 518B, Appendix III.

99. Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 176.

100. Patman, 231.

101. Dunnigan, 19.

102. Gebru, “The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited,” 661.

103. Tächané Mäsfen.

104. Gebru, “The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited,” 661.

105. Ibid.

Chapter Six

1. Connell, 179; Gebru Tareke, “From Lash to Red Star: The Pitfalls of Counter-Insurgency in Ethiopia 1980–82,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, no. 3 (September 2002): 479; Dawit, 109.

2. Bahru, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, 258; see also Colin Legum and Bill Lee, *Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1977), 56; Roy Pateman, *Eritrea: Even the Stones Are Burning* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1998), 134; Ottaway and Ottaway, 160; Richard Sherman, *Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 86; Dawit, 88–89.

3. Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle over Eritrea 1962–1978* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), 101–2; Ottaway and Ottaway, 160.

4. MOND Archives, Operations 157, Ya 15ña Egräña Shaläqa Yä Wegiya Tarik 4; Gilkes, “Revolution and Military Strategy,” 727.

5. MOND Archives, Intelligence 110, Naqfa Yämigäñäwen Tor Kā Wonbädéwoch Lämalaqäq Yäqäräbä Hasab [A Proposal Submitted to Relieve the Army at Naqfa from Rebels], 7/7/69 E.C. (March 16, 1977).

6. MOND Archives, Operations 157, 11.

7. Ibid., 5–7; See also Täsfayé, *Yä Tor Méda Welo*, 75, 79–80, 106, 110, 114–17, 123.

8. Gilkes, “Revolution and Military Strategy,” 727.

9. Täsfayé, *Yä Tor Méda Welo*, 124, 128; MOND Archives, Operations 157, 7–8. The period between late 1976 and early 1977 was characterized by power struggle within the Därg between Mängestu and his associates on one hand and a group that was later accused of supporting the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) on the other. On February 3, 1977, Mängestu emerged as the undisputed leader by executing seven Därg members.

10. Täsfayé H. Maryam and Wondmagäñ Seläshi.

11. MOND Archives, Operations 157, 8.

12. Ibid., 9.

13. Ibid., 10.

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 10–11; see also Täsfayé, *Yä Tor Méda Welo*, 168.
16. MOND Archives, Operations 157, 11–12.
17. Ibid., 12–14.
18. Ibid., 10, 40.
19. MOND Archives, Administration 380, 15ña Egräña Shaläqan Kä Wonbädé Selä Malaqäq [Relieving the Fifteenth Infantry Battalion from Rebels], 23/5/69 E.C. (January 31, 1977).
20. MOND Archives, Operations 157, 25.
21. Ibid., 30.
22. Ibid., 35.
23. Ibid., 16–19; James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, *Never Kneel Down: Drought, Development and Liberation in Eritrea* (Trenton, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1985), 53; Lloyd Ellingson, “The Origins and Development of the Eritrean Liberation Movement,” in *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, edited by Robert L. Hess (Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, 1978), 624; Gilkes, “Revolution and Military Strategy,” 728; Sherman, 88; Colin Legum and Bill Lee, *The Horn of Africa in Continuing Crisis* (New York: Africana Publishing, 1979), 27; Robert Machida, *Eritrea: The Struggle for Independence* (Trenton, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1987), 68; Connell, 94; Halliday and Molyneux, 114.
24. Firebrace and Holland, 53; Machida, 70–71; Legum and Lee, *The Horn of Africa in Continuing Crisis*, 28; Halliday and Molyneux, 171; Ottaway and Ottaway, 171; David Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), 139; Connell, 94–95.
25. Bahru (2002), 254; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 198–99; Dawit, 41.
26. MOND Archives, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät Yä Zämächa Report [A Ten-Year Report of Operations], 1977 E.C., 9–14.
27. Täsfayé H. Maryam and Tächané Mäsfen; see also Connell, 171–72; Täsfayé, *Yä Tor Méda Welo*, 245–46.
28. Täsfayé, *Yä Tor Méda Welo*, 250–52.
29. MOND Archives, Operations File No., 062, Bä Naqfa Bär Yätädärägä Wegiya [The Fighting at the Gates of Naqfa], 1971 E.C., 1–6; Operations File No., 168, Naqfa Genbar [The Naqfa Front], 1972 E.C.; see also Mesfin Gabriel, “The War Nobody Wins,” *New African* no. 145 (September 1979): 38; Africa Watch, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 115–16; Araya Tseggai, “The History of the Eritrean Struggle,” in *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace* (Nottingham, U.K.: Russell Press, 1988), 81.
30. MOND Archives, Operations 062, Bä Naqfa Bär Yätädärägä Wegiya, 15.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Hussein Ahmäd, *Mäswaetnät Enna Şenat [Sacrifice and Endurance]* (Addis Ababa: Star Printing Press, 1997 E.C.), 121.
34. Gännät, 261.
35. Märdasa Lélisa, Negatu Bogalä, and Bähaylu Kendé; see also Tedla, 1–3; Gilkes, “Revolution and Military Strategy,” 731.
36. Connell, 217; Halliday and Molyneux, 173; Dawit, 114.

37. MOND Archives, Administration 4635, 7.
38. Firebrace and Holland, 54; Gebru, “From Lash to Red Star,” 474.
39. Gebru, “From Lash to Red Star,” 477; Mäsfén, 38.
40. Roy Pateman, “Eritrea Under the Dergue,” *Journal of Eritrean Studies* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1987): 5; Gebru, “From Lash to Red Star,” 476–77.
41. MOND Archives, Administration 4635, 15–23.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. MOND Archives, Administration File No. 3842, Yä Mäbräq Ez Yäsaw Hayl [Manpower of the Mäbräq Command], 9/5/74 E.C. (January 17, 1982).
45. Bähaylu Kendé, Negatu Bogalä, and Abbeyyé Färrädä.
46. Hussein, 122–23.
47. MOND Archives, Operations 086, Wäqtawi Yä Märäja Gemet [Current Intelligence Estimate], 10/2/75 E.C. (October 20, 1982), 1–5.
48. MOND Archives, Operations 044, Yä Qäy Kokäb Zämächa Yä Elät Hunéta Report [A Daily Situation Report of Operation Red Star], 1974 E.C.; Operations File No. 260, Weqaw Ez [The Weqaw Command], 1974 E.C.; Täräfworq Tolosa, Taddäsä T. Haymanot, and Abära Jämbäré.
49. MOND Archives, Administration 4635, 16–18.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.; Administration 3842, Kä Zämächa Mämriya Yätäwosädä Yä Elät Report [A Daily Report Taken from the Operations Department], 1974 E.C., 1–2.
52. Hussein, 130; Gebru, “From Lash to Red Star,” 482; Gännät, 238.
53. MOND Archives, Operations 086, Wäqtawi Yä Märäja Gemet, 5–10; Märdasa Lélisa and Bähaylu Kendé.
54. Gebru, “From Lash to Red Star,” 483.
55. MOND Archives, Administration 4635, 19–22.
56. Connell, 218.
57. MOND Archives, Operation 044, 1–2; Administration 4635, 20–21.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. MOND Archives, Administration 4635, 24.
63. Gebru, “From Lash to Red Star,” 488.
64. Märdasa Lélisa, Abbeyyé Färrädä, and Täsfayé H. Maryam.
65. Ibid.
66. Gebru, “From Lash to Red Star,” 493–94.
67. MOND Archives, Operations 168, Bä Wogän Tor Lay Yätayu Dekmätoch Enna Mänse’ewoch [The Weaknesses and Their Causes Evident in the Army], 1974 E.C.
68. Märdasa Lélisa, Abbeyyé Färrädä, and Negatu Bogalä.
69. MOND Archives, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hagär Bä Hua’sä Yä Täfäşämu Wotadäräwi Enqesqasewoch, 24.
70. Abbeyyé Färrädä, Tayyé Berhanu, and Mulu Sahlé.
71. MOND Archives, Operations 168, 25.
72. Ibid., 27.
73. Ibid., 28–30.

74. Ibid., 31–34.
75. Gännät, 253–55.
76. Ibid.
77. MOND Archives, Operations 168, 36–39.
78. Gännät, 255–56.
79. Täsfayé, *Yä Tor Méda Welo*, 298–302.
80. MOND Archives, Operations 168, 37–39.
81. Bähaylu Kendé.
82. Täsfayé, *Yä Tor Méda Welo*, 303–4.
83. MOND Archives, Operations 168, 39.
84. MOND Archives, Operations 168, 49–50.
85. Gännät, 257.
86. MOND Archives, Operations 168, Yä Shabiya Yä Wegiya Selt [The EPLF's Combat Tactics], 1–5.
87. Täsfayé, *Yä Tor Méda Welo*, 315.
88. Pateman, *Eritrea*, 143.
89. MOND Archives, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hägär Bä Hua'sä Yä Täfäšamu Wotadärawi Enqesqaséwoch, 45.
90. Dawit, 108.
91. Kevin Ruane, *War and Revolution in Vietnam 1930–1975* (London: Routledge, 1998), 21.
92. Gérard Chaliand, *The Art of War in World History From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 647.
93. Märdasa Lélisa, Bähaylu Kendé, and Täsfayé H. Maryam.
94. Gebru, "From Af Abet to Shire," 245.
95. Gännät, 259; see also Gebru, "From Af Abet to Shire," 247.
96. Dawit, 364.
97. Märdasa Lélisa and Täsfayé H. Maryam.
98. Gebru, "From Af Abet to Shire," 247–48.
99. MOND, Administration File No. 754A, Bä Wägän Yädäräsä Gudat [Damage Inflicted on Government Troops], 1980 E.C.
100. Gebru, "From Af Abet to Shire," 247–48.
101. Gännät, 247.
102. Gebru, "From Af Abet to Shire," 248–49; see also Gilkes, "The Battle of Af Abet and Eritrean Independence," 45; Alemseged Tesfai, *Two Weeks in the Trenches: Reminiscences of Childhood and War in Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 2002), 100.
103. Shāwarāga Bihonāñ, Taddäsä T. Haymanot, and Märdasa Lélisa.
104. Ibid.
105. Alemseged, 102, 104–5.
106. Chaliand, 960.
107. Gebru, "From Af Abet to Shire," 250–51.
108. Ibid.
109. Alemseged, 101.
110. MOND Archives, Operations 069, Yä Zämächa Yä Elät Hunéta [Operations Daily Situation] 8–9/7/80 E.C. (March 17–18, 1988), 1.
111. Wrong, 333.

112. Ibid., 333–34; Alemseged, 120–21. Saleh told me that EPLF radio operators were listening to the conversation between an Ethiopian pilot and his superiors. The pilot was heard saying, “Why should I destroy my own property!” when ordered to bomb government convoys that were stuck at Ad Shärum. He was reluctant to take orders from his superiors.

113. Ibid.

114. MOND Archives, Operations 069, Yä Zämächa Yä Elät Hunéta [Operations Daily Situation], 9–10/7/80 E.C. (March 18–19, 1988), 1.

115. Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 250–53.

116. Gännät, 277.

117. Okbazghi Yohannes, *Eritrea: A Pawn in World Politics* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 272; Hussein, 141; see also Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 253; Dawit, 365.

118. MOND Archives, Administration 5173, Col. Täsfayé Terfé to Operations Main Department, 20/8/80 E.C. (April 28, 1988).

119. Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 254–55.

120. Wubätu Şäggayé.

121. Saleh Mahmud.

122. Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 255–56; Dawit, 365.

123. Hussein, 143; Wubätu Şäggayé and Kasayé Chämäda.

124. Hussein, 145; Nägga Mulaw and Kasayé Asäggahäñ.

125. MOND Archives, Operations 008, Yä Elät Telegram [Daily Telegraph], 1980 E.C.; Şadqan G. Tänsay.

126. MOND Archives, Operations 267, Br. Gen. Addis Agellachäw to Maj. Gen. Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, 20/7/80 E.C. (March 29, 1988).

127. Ibid.

128. MOND, Administration 5829, Lt. Col. Läggäsä Dañé to TRA Operations Department, 6/12/80 E.C. (August 12, 1988); Täwoldä G. Wold; TPLF, News Release: TPLF–EPDM Joint Victories, May 30, 1988, London, 1–2.

129. MOND, Administration 108–120C, Br. Gen. Tächané Mäsfen to Maj. Gen. Seyoum Mäkonnen, 26/11/81 E.C.

130. Tekeste Melake, “The Battle of Shire (February 1989): A Turning Point in the Protracted War in Ethiopia,” in *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies: Proceedings of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, edited by Harold G. Marcus (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1994), 969; *Addis Zämän*, 7/9/80 E.C. (May 15, 1988).

131. *Addis Zämän*, 13/9/80 E.C. (May 21, 1988); Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 256.

132. MOND, Operations 554, Zämächa Adwa [Operation Adwa], 7/10/80 E.C. (June 14, 1988). 1–5; Yä Zämächa Adwa Me’eraf And Zägäba [Report of the First Phase of Operation Adwa], 1980 E.C., 1.

133. Ibid.

134. Ibid.; Haylu Bäräwaq.

135. Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 259.

136. “Ya Hayyälom Tezetawoch [Recollections of Hayyälom],” *Efoyta* 3, no. 1 (1986): 22.

137. Şadqan G. Tänsay.

138. Tesfamariam Tesfahunegn, “The Battle of Shire 19 February 1989” (bachelor’s thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1998).

139. Nāgash Eshātu; Ya Hayyālom Tezetawoch, 22–23; Tesfamariam, 30.
140. Haylu Bārāwaq and Nāgash Eshātu.
141. Tesfamariam, 29–31; Gännät, 262; Haylu Bārāwaq and Nāgash Eshātu.
142. MOND, Operations 554, Br. Gen. Kenfä Gäbr’el Denqu to Lāggāsä Asfaw, 29/11/80 E.C. (August 5, 1988).
143. Anonymous.
144. MOND, Operations 554, Zāmācha Adwa Me’eraf Arat [Phase Four of Operation Adwa], 21/11/80 E.C. (July 28, 1988).
145. Tesfamariam, 34–38.
146. Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 261.
147. MOND, Operations 368, Zāmācha Aksum [Operation Aksum], 14/4/81 E.C. (December 23, 1988); Tesfamariam, 43.
148. Gännät, 262.
149. Tesfamariam, 43–46.
150. Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 262; Mulugéta Dārso and Dubbé Ejjigu.
151. Tesfamariam, 48, 51.
152. Ibid.
153. Şagga Mogäs, Mākälakäya Särawitu Lāmen Wädäqä? [Why Did the Defense Force Collapse?], *Tobya* 3, no. 5 (1987 E.C.), 30.
154. Tesfamariam, 53–59; Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 264–66; Tekeste, “The Battle of Shire (February, 1989),” 974–75.
155. Şadqan G. Tänsay and Seyyé Abreha.
156. Tesfamariam, 54.
157. Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 266.
158. Şadqan G. Tänsay.
159. MOND, Operations 476, Maj. Gen. Mulatu Nāgash to Lāggāsä Asfaw, 12/6/81 E.C. (February 19, 1989).
160. Kidu Berhané, Seyoum Bärhé, and Kasahun Rätta; MOND, Administration 5817, Maj. Gen. Märe’d Negussé to Maj. Gen. Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, 5/4/80 E.C. (December 15, 1987).
161. Şadqan G. Tänsay.
162. Tesfamariam, 59–64; Gebru, “From Af Abet to Shire,” 267–68.
163. Ibid.
164. MOND, Administration 108–120C, Br. Gen. Tächané Mäsfen to Maj. Gen. Seyoum Mäkonnen, 26/11/81 E.C. (August 2, 1989).
165. Täsfayé H. Maryam and Tächané Mäsfen.
166. Gännät, 262–63.
167. Ibid., 272–73.
168. Bahru, “The Military and Militarism in Africa,” 293; Gännät, 301–5.
169. MOND, Operations 516, Br. Gen. Wondwosän Säyfu, TRA’s Operations Officer, to National Revolutionary Operations Department, 22/9/81 E.C.
170. Şadqan G. Tänsay. Following the disintegration of the EPRP in 1978, some of its former members formed the Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (EPDM) and began military operations in northern Wollo.
171. MOND, Operations 516, Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla to Maj. Gen. Märdasa Lélisa, 25/12/81 E.C. (August 31, 1989), 26/12/81 (September 1, 1989); Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla to Maj. Gen. Asrat Berru, 16/11/81 E.C. (July 23, 1989).

172. Şägga Mogäs, “Kä Allamata Woldya: Yä Qädmow Särawit Bä Sämén Wollo” [From Allamata to Woldya: The Former Army in Northern Wollo], *Tobyä* 3, no. 6 (1987 E.C.), 13–15.

173. Ibid.

174. Şadqan G. Tänsay and Seyyé Abreha.

175. MOND, Operations 262, Bä Soasä Genbar Yätäkänawonu Zämächawoch [Operations Carried Out on the TRA’s Front], 26/12/81–15/1/82 E.C. (August 1, 1989–September 25, 1989).

176. MOND, Operations 516, Br. Gen. Märdasa Lélisa to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 2/13/81 E.C. (September 7, 1989).

177. Ibid., 30/12/81 E.C. (September 5, 1989); Şägga, “Kä Allamata Woldya,” 16; Hussein, 149.

178. Märdasa Lélisa.

179. Şägga, 16.

180. Şägga Mogäs, “Kä Woldya Eskä Midda: Kä Mängaga Yätäfaläqäqaw Yä Särawitu Del” [From Woldya to Midda: The Victory Snatched from the Army’s Jaws], *Tobyä* 3, no. 7 (1987 E.C.), 29–30; MOND, Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report [TRA’s Operations Report], 26/12/81–15/1/82 E.C. (August 1–September 25, 1989).

181. Şadqan G. Tänsay; MOND, Intelligence 021, Yä Soasä Wätadärawi Märäja Mämriya Amätawi Report [Annual Report of the TRA’s Military Intelligence Department], 1982 E.C.

182. MOND, Operations 536A, NROC to 603rd Corps, 15/1/82 E.C. (September 25, 1989); Asgälä Täsfahun, Mulualäm Abbadi, and Bāyānā Haylé.

183. MOND, Operations 536A, Br. Gen. Abbäbä H. Sellasé to Operations Department, 25/1/82 (October 5, 1989); 1/1/82 E.C. (September 11, 1989).

184. Haylé Mälläsä.

185. MOND, Administration 84–91B, Yä Zämächa Yä Elät Report [Daily Report of Operations], 28–29/1/82 E.C. (October 8–9, 1989); Operations 536A, Deputy Chief of Staff to Chief of Staff, 30/1/82 E.C. (October 10, 1989); 603rd Corps to Operations Department, 27/1/82 E.C. (October 7, 1989).

186. MOND, Administration 84–91B, Yä Zämächa Yä Elät Report [Daily Report of Operations], 29–30/1/82 E.C. (October 9–10, 1989).

187. MOND, Intelligence 021, Yä Soasä Wätadärawi Märäja, 1982 E.C.; Şägga, “Kä Woldya Eskä Midda,” 31.

188. MOND, Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report [TRA’s Operations Report], 7–9/2/82 E.C. (October 17–19, 1989), 1–2; see also Operations 536A, 603rd Corps to Operations Department, 8/2/82 E.C. (October 18, 1989).

189. MOND, Operations 546, Br. Gen. Telahun Argaw to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 11/2/82 E.C. (October 21, 1989).

190. Ibid.; Maj. Gen. Rāggasa Jimma to 605th Corps Commander, 12/3/82 E.C. (November 21, 1989); Operations 536A, Deputy Chief of Staff to 603rd Corps Commander, 7/2/82 E.C. (October 17, 1989); Br. Gen. Abbäbä H. Sellasé to Operations Department, 25/2/82 E.C. (November 4, 1989).

191. MOND, Administration 84–91B, Fourth Revolutionary Army (FRA) to Chief of Staff, 5/3/82 E.C.; Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report, 7–19/2/82 E.C. (October 17–29, 1989).

192. MOND, Operations 418, Zāmācha Māket [Operation Defend], 24/3/82 E.C. (December 3, 1989), 1–5.

193. Ibid.

194. MOND, Operations 262, Yā Sārawitoch Enna Yā Koroch Yā Zāmācha Report [Operations Report of Armies and Corps], 9–15/4/82 E.C. (December 18, 1989), 1–6.

195. Ibid.

196. Ibid.

197. MOND, Administration 5822, Br. Gen. Abbābā H. Sellasé, Hulātāñaw Yā Dābrā Tabor Wedqāt [The Second Failure in Dābrā Tabor], 30/8/82 E.C. (May 8, 1990), 2; Hussein, 151; Häylā Mäsqāl Woldä Şadeq and Nägga Aragaw.

198. Ibid.

199. MOND, Operations 427–436, Kā Tālat Yātātālāfā Yā Radio Māle’eket [A Radio Message Intercepted from the Enemy], 1/5/82 E.C. (January 9, 1990); Mākuanent Mālkamu and Seyoum Bārhé.

200. Abbābā H. Sellasé, Wasihun Negatu, and Tamrat Tebābu.

201. MOND, Operations 262, Ya Soasā Samentawi Yā Zāmācha Report [The TRA’s Weekly Operations Report], 6–14/5/82 E.C. (January 14–22, 1990); Intelligence 022–24, Yā Soasā Wātadārawi Mārāja Amātawi Report [The TRA’s Intelligence Annual Report], 1982 E.C.

202. Ibid.

203. Şadqan G. Tānsay and Seyyē Abreha.

204. MOND, Intelligence 022–24, Yā Soasā Wātadārawi Mārāja Amātawi Report [The TRA’s Military Intelligence Annual Report], 1982 E.C., 52–56.

205. Taddāsā, *Ay Meşewa*, E.C. 1–3; Fontrier, 227.

206. Taddāsā, *Ay Meşewa*, 26, 32.

207. Ibid., 76.

208. Abiy W. Maryam.

209. Taddāsā, *Ay Meşewa*, 97–100; see also Fontrier, 229.

210. Taddāsā, *Ay Meşewa*, 106–7.

211. Ibid., 134, 149–56.

212. Ibid., 188–93.

213. MOND, Operations 493, Bā Ahunu Gizé Yallā Tāwagi Hayl Enna Māsariya [Currently Existing Combatants and Weapons], 1982 E.C., 1.

214. Anonymous.

215. Abbābā, 4–6, 21–22; Mäsārāt Gālaw, Alāmu Mābraté, and Wasihun Negatu.

216. Ibid., 8–10, 14–16.

217. MOND, Administration 237, Māngestu H. Maryam to Tāsfayé G. Kidan, Häylā Giorgis Häbtā Maryam, and Dāmessé Bulto, 16/11/80 E.C. (July 23, 1988).

218. Şadqan G. Tānsay.

219. See, for instance, Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People’s War: Selected Writings of General Vo Nguyen Giap*, edited by Russell Stetler (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 123; Taber, 56; Fuller, 49; Clausewitz, 18.

220. Clausewitz, 28.

221. Abbābā, 21–23.

222. Ibid., 28–32.

223. Ibid., 41, 48, 57; Mäsārāt Gālaw. After overrunning government defenses between Mount Guna and Baher Dar, EPRDF forces found it strategically advisable to

retreat from the plains of Dära and Fogära and entrench themselves in the Aläm Saga Mountains.

224. MOND, Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report [The TRA's Operations Report], 10–17/7/82 E.C. (March 19–26, 1990), 1–2; Ba Soasä Genbar Yätädärägä We-giya Acher Zägäba [A Brief Report on the Fighting on the TRA's Front], 16–30/7/82 E.C. (March 25–April 8, 1990), 1–3.

225. Ibid.

226. Ibid.

227. MOND, Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report, 1–11/8/82 E.C. (April 9–19, 1990), 1–2; Ya Soasä Genbar Samentawi Report [Weekly Report of the TRA's Front], 8–13/8/82 E.C. (April 16–21, 1990), 1–2.

228. MOND, Operations 418, Yä Soasä Tor Asäläläf [Deployment of the TRA's Forces], 1982 E.C., 1–6. In major operations, it had become common to deploy famed units such as the Third Infantry and the 102nd Airborne Divisions. Although such units suffered heavy manpower depletion in earlier operations, they were given fresh recruits to replace losses. As a result, they managed to resurface right up to 1991.

229. Ibid.

230. Ibid.

231. MOND, Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report, 13–19/9/82 E.C. (May 21–27, 1990), 1.

232. Şadqan G. Tänsay, Täfärra Mammo, Nägga Mulaw, and Solomon Taddäsä.

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Chapter Seven

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Conclusion

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36. Connell, 232.
37. Tesfamariam, 24–25.
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41. Mäsärät Gälaw.
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- File Nos. 012–14, Yä Märäja Astäwaše'o [Intelligence Summary], 16–26/8/83 E.C.
- File No. 015, Yä Märäja Report [Intelligence Report], 1977 E.C.
- File No. 015, Yä Shabiya Yä Polätika, Enna Wätadärawi Märäja Mäwaqeroch [EPLF's Political and Military Intelligence Structures], 1980 E.C.
- File No. 015, Yä Wegiya Märäja [Combat Intelligence], 10/8/72 E.C.
- File No. 017, Bä Ogadénena Bä Boräna Täräf Kä Somalia Tor Gar Yätadärägä Zämächa [An Operation Carried Out in the Ogadén and Borana Border Against Somalia's Army], 1956 E.C.
- File No. 021, TRA Military Intelligence to TRA's Army Units, 13/9/81 E.C.
- File Nos. 022–24, Yä Soasä Wätadärawi Märäja Amätawi Report [The TRA's Annual Military Intelligence Report], 1982 E.C.
- File No. 092, Yä Hewohat Wätadärawi Aquam [Military Structure of the TPLF], 1976 E.C.
- File No. 110, Br. Gen. Abbäbä G. Mäsqäl to Chief of Staff, 19/8/82 E.C.
- File No. 110, Br. Gen. Abbäbä G. Mäsqäl to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 26/10/82 E.C.
- File No. 110, Naqfa Yämigäñäwen Tor Kä Wänbädéwoch Lämallaqäq Yäqäräbä Hasab [A Proposal Submitted to Relieve the Army at Naqfa from Rebels], 7/7/69 E.C.
- File No. 230, Operation Mäbräq [Operation Lightning], 29/3/57 E.C.

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- File No. 755, Chief of Staff to Commander of Ground Forces, 15/8/82 E.C.
- File No. 755, Education Main Department to Logistics Department, 3/8/82 E.C.
- File No. 755, Ground Forces Logistics Department to Freight Transport Corporation, 22/7/82 E.C.
- File No. 755, Ground Forces Logistics Department to Ground Forces Finance Department, 18/7/82 E.C.
- File No. 755, Ground Forces Logistics Department to MOND Logistics Main Department, 21/7/82 E.C.
- File No. 755, Maj. Gen. Abbäbä W. Maryam to Commander of Ground Forces, 8/7/82 E.C.

OPERATIONS FILES

- File No. 011, Yä Mägänaña Kefl Tägbär [Duties of the Communication Unit].
- File No. 040, Br. Gen. Asrat Berru to Chief of Staff, 25/6/73 E.C.
- File No. 044, Yä Elät Hunéta Report [Daily Situation Report], 14–15/6/74 E.C.
- File No. 044, Yä Qäy Kokäb Zämächa Yä Elät Hunéta Report [A Daily Situation Report of Operation Red Star], 1974 E.C.
- File No. 060, Bä 603 Kor Genbar Yätädärägä Wegiya [The Fighting That Took Place on the 603rd Corps's Front], 16/6/83–5/7/83 E.C.
- File No. 062, Bä Naqfa Bär Yatädärägä Wegiya [The Fighting at the Gates of Naqfa], 1971 E.C.
- File No. 069, Yä Zämächa Yä Elät Hunéta [Operations Daily Situation], 9–10/7/80 E.C.
- File No. 086, Selä Tälät Yä Märäja Astäwaše'o [Intelligence Summary About the Enemy], Miyazya, 1980 E.C.
- File No. 086, SRA's Intelligence Department to MOND's Main Intelligence Department, 12/1/83 E.C.
- File No. 086, Wäqtawi Yä Märäja Gemet [Current Intelligence Estimate], 10/2/75 E.C.
- File No. 096, Yä Ayär Wäläd Keflä Tor Aquam [Organization of an Airborne Division].
- File No. 100, Ya Project Spartakiad 81–2 Seltäna [The Training of the 81–2 Spartakiad].
- File No. 155, Yä Eritrea Enna Yä Tegray Guday Men Mähon Aläbät [What Should Be Done About Eritrea and Tigray], Hedar, 1981 E.C.
- File No. 157, Yä 15ña Egräña Shaläqa Yä Wegiya Tarik [A History of the Fifteenth Infantry Battalion's Engagements], 1969 E.C.
- File No. 159, Bä Project 1/83 Endiqätär Yätäfaqädä Mädäbäña Särawit [Regular Forces to Be Employed by Project 1/83], 1983 E.C.
- File No. 168, Bä Eritrea Kelä Hägär Bä Hua'sä Yä Täfašämu Wätadärawi Enqesqaséwoch [Military Activities Carried Out by the SRA in Eritrea].
- File No. 168, Bä Wägän Tor Lay Yätayu Dekmätoch Enna Mänse'ewoch [The Weaknesses and Their Causes Evident in the Army], 1974 E.C.
- File No. 168, Bä Wägän Tor Lay Yätayu Dekmätoch [Weaknesses Observed in the Government Army], 1975 E.C.
- File No. 168, Naqfa Genbar [The Naqfa Front].
- File No. 168, Ya 15gna Egräña Shaläqa Yä Wegiya Tarik [History of the Combat of the Fifteenth Infantry Battalion], 1/12/71 E.C.
- File No. 168, Yä Eritrea Wänbädé Anäsas Enna Edgät [The Rise and Development of the Eritrean Rebels].
- File No. 168, Yä Huasä Zämächawoch [Operations of the SRA], 1978 E.C.
- File No. 168, Yä Shabiya Yä Wegiya Selt [The EPLF's Combat Tactics].
- File No. 168, Yä Qäy Kokäb Zämächa [Operation Red Star], 1974 E.C.
- File No. 186, Defense of the Ogadén, July 1966.
- File No. 202, A Study of Compulsory Military Service, 1968.
- File No. 260, Weqaw Ez [The Weqaw Command], 1974 E.C.
- File No. 262, Bä Soasä Genbar Yätädärägä Wegya Acher Zägäbä [A Brief Report on the Fighting on the TRA's Front], 16–30/7/82 E.C.

- File No. 262, Bā Soasā Genbar Yātākānawonu Zāmāchawoch [Operations Carried Out on the TRA's Front], 26/12/81–15/1/82 E.C.
- File No. 262, Yā Sārawitoch Enna Yā Koroch Yā Zāmācha Report [Operations Report of Armies and Corps], 9–15/4/82 E.C.
- File No. 262, Yā Soasā Zāmācha Report, 13–19/9/82 E.C.
- File No. 267, Br. Gen. Addis Aggelachāw to Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, 21/7/80 E.C.
- File No. 325(B), Br. Gen. John Collins to Lt. Gen. Kābbādā Gäbré, 14/2/72 E.C.
- File No. 368, Maj. Gen. Asrat Berru to Maj. Gen. Märe'd Negussé, 8/9/80 E.C.
- File No. 418, TRA's Commander to Task Force 3A Commander, 15/9/82 E.C.
- File No. 418, Ya Soasā Tor Asäläläf [Deployment of the TRA's Forces], 1982 E.C.
- File No. 418, Zāmācha Māket [Operation Defend], 24/3/82 E.C.
- File Nos. 427–436, Kā Tālat Yātātäläfä Yā Radio Mäle'ekt [A Radio Message Intercepted from the Enemy], 1/5/82 E.C.
- File Nos. 427–436, Lt. Gen. Addis Tādla to 605th Corps, 25/2/82 E.C.
- File Nos. 427–436, Operations Department to Military Intelligence, 24/4/82 E.C.
- File No. 476, Maj. Gen. Mulatu Nāgash to Lāggāsā Asfaw, 12/6/81 E.C.
- File No. 493, Bā Ahunu Gizé Yallā Tāwagi Hayl Enna Māsariya [Currently Existing Combatants and Weapons], 1982 E.C.
- File No. 493, Bā 102 Ayār Wäläd Keflā Tor Lay Yādārāsā Gudat [Damage Inflicted on the 102nd Airborne Division], 25/9/82 E.C.
- File No. 493, Chief of Staff to Main Departments of MOND, 13/2/82 E.C.
- File No. 493, Operations Department to Chief of Staff, 15/8/82 E.C.
- File No. 493, Yāwādāmu Enna Yātāfu Wanna Wanna Māsariyawoch [Major Weapons Destroyed and Lost], 1967–1981 E.C.
- File Nos. 513–514, Deputy Chief of Staff to TRA's Commander, 27/9/82 E.C.
- File Nos. 513–514, Operations Main Department to TRA, 29/9/82 E.C.
- File Nos. 513–514, Maj. Gen. Kenfä Gabre'l Denqu to Operations Department, 5/12/82 E.C.
- File Nos. 513–514, TRA's Commander to Chief of Staff, 26/9/82 E.C.
- File Nos. 513–514, TRA to Main Military Intelligence Department, 28/9/82 E.C.
- File Nos. 513–514, TRA to Operations Main Department, 28/9/82, 8/10/82 E.C.
- File Nos. 513–514, TRA's Operations Department to MOND's Main Operations Department, 26/9/82 E.C.
- File No. 516, Br. Gen. Mārdasa Lélisa to Lt. Gen. Addis Tādla, 2/13/81 E.C.
- File No. 516, Br. Gen. Wondwosān Säyfu, TRA's Operations Officer, to National Revolutionary Operations Department, 22/9/81 E.C.
- File No. 516, Lt. Gen. Addis Tādla to Maj. Gen. Asrat Berru, 16/11/81 E.C.
- File No. 516, Lt. Gen. Addis Tādla to Maj. Gen. Mārdasa Lélisa, 25/12/81, 26/12/81 E.C.
- File No. 518B, Adhariw Yā Somalia Māngest Selākahédäben Gelš Wārara Atāqalay Zāgāba 1966–1971 [A Comprehensive Report of the Flagrant Invasion Carried Out by the Reactionary Somali Government 1966–1971 E.C.], 1971 E.C.
- File No. 522, Bā Tārara Lay Yā Egrāña Keflā Tor Yā Matqat Wegiya Māsārātawi Dān-boch [Basic Rules of an Infantry Division's Offensive on a Mountain].
- File No. 532, Br. Gen. Gétanäh Haylé to Chief of Staff, 13/8/83 E.C.

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 File No. 536A, Deputy Chief of Staff to Chief of Staff, 30/1/82 E.C.
 File No. 536A, Deputy Chief of Staff to 603rd Corps Commander, 7/2/82 E.C.
 File No. 536A, 603rd Corps to Operations Department, 27/1/82 E.C.
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 Yä 1978 Yä Wätadārawi Dāhnenät Tebāqa Report [The 1978 Report of the Military Security], 1978 E.C.
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- FO 371/146603, Military Aid, May 13, 1960.
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 FO 371/46075, War Office to British Legation, June 21, 1944.
 FO 371/146607, British Legation to Foreign Office, May 23, 1960.

Informants

This section lists the informants consulted in the course of the research for this book. Each entry lists the informant's name and title, followed by the date and place that the interview was conducted, and the informant's role.

- Abbadi, Mulualäm, private. March 29, 2006, Sheré. A former TPLF fighter.
 Abreha, Seyyê, Ato*. February 12, 2009, Addis Ababa. Head of the TPLF's military committee and later that of the EPRDF.
 Aduña, Kasaw, Ato. March 9, 2006, Kemer Dengay. A resident of the town of Kemer Dingay who witnessed the battles of Guna.
 Ahmäd, Yesa, colonel. March 3, 2006, Gondär. Commander of the Sixteenth (Sänteq) Mechanized Brigade.
 Alämu, Admasu, major. March 31, 2006, Gondär. A brigade commander during the war with Somalia.
 Ali, Adäm, Ato. March 3, 2006, Mount Guguftu. A peasant living around Guguftu.
 Amära, Bäqälä, Ato. March 23, 2006, Dässé. Head of the Ethiopian Red Cross Office at Hayq. His team treated the wounded and buried the dead during the Battle of Hayq.
 Anagräñ, Embibäl, Ato. February 2, 2006, Jijiga. When the war broke out in Dägähabur, he took part in the defense of Jijiga.
 Aragaw, Nägga, priest. March 30, 2007, Mähal Méda. A priest residing in Mähal Méda.
 Asäggahäñ, Kasayé, captain. April 3, 2007, Hayq. A junior commander in the Third Division.
 Asfaw, Mätkäl, captain. March 14, 2007, Däbarq. A participant in the Battle of Dansha and Däjäna on the side of the TPLF.
 Ashagré, Haylu, Ato. March 18, 2006, Karra Mesheg. A peasant residing in Karra Mesheg who witnessed the Battle of Karra Mesheg.
 Assäfa, Molla, private. April 1, 2007, Kuta Bär. A member of the Seventeenth (Tärb) Infantry Division.
 Aynaläm, Taddälu, private. March 27, 2006, Mäqälé. A fighter for the TPLF in the Aqaqi Division.
 Bälaynäb, Gezaw, major general. July 6, 2007, Addis Ababa. Commandant of the Harär Military Academy, commander of the Ground Forces, and chief of staff of the armed forces.
 Bäräka, W. Sellasé, lieutenant general. November 23, 2007, Addis Ababa. Commander of the Ground Forces and martial administrator of Balé.
 Bäräwaq, Haylu, brigadier general.† March 3, 2008, London. Commander of the 603rd Corps.
 Bärhé, Seyoum, Ato. March 29, 2006, Sheré. A former TPLF fighter.
 Berhané, Kidu, captain. March 29, 2006, Sheré. A former TPLF fighter.

- Berhanu, Tayyé, major. February 6, 2006, Harär. Commander of the Thirty-Ninth Mountain Infantry Brigade of the Nineteenth MID.
- Bihonäñ, Shäwaräga, colonel. July 5, 2007, Addis Ababa. Political officer of the Second Revolutionary Army (SRA).
- Bogalä, Negatu, major. March 3, 2003, Addis Ababa. Political officer of the Nineteenth Mountain Infantry Division and later the 604th Corps.
- Chämäda, Kasayé, brigadier general. June 22, 2007, Addis Ababa. Commander of the Sixteenth Santeq Mechanized Brigade.
- Chomän, Tamru, captain. July 4, 2007, Addis Ababa. Political officer of the Fourth Mechanized Division.
- Dämäwoz, Gäbré, Ato. March 5, 2007, Wärräta. An intelligence agent for the EPDM.
- Därso, Mulugéta, Ato. March 14, 2007, Däbarq. A participant in the Battle of Däbarq as a private.
- Egzu, Adanä G., lieutenant. March 17, 2006, Märañña. A former fighter of EPDM.
- Ejjegu, Dubbé, corporal. March 15, 2007, Dabat. A participant in the Battle of Dabat.
- Eshätu, Nägash, major. March 31, 2006, Gondär. Operations officer of the Seventh Infantry Division and later security officer of the 603rd Corps.
- Fädlu, Haykäl, captain. March 21, 2006, Dässé. A spy, a squad commander under EPDM, and then a platoon commander under EPDM.
- Färrädä, Abeyyé, major. June 22, 2003, Gondär. Political officer of the Twenty-Second Mountain Infantry Division and later the Mäket Command.
- Gälaw, Mäsärät, colonel. September 11, 2007, Bahar Dar. Commander of the Seventh Division and administrative officer of the 603rd Corps.
- Gässäsä, Jämbäru, captain. March 3, 2006, Gondär. Party secretary of the Mänter Command and later the 607th Corps.
- Gétahun, Damtäw, private. March 18, 2006, Märañña. A private in the Thirty-Sixth Brigade of the Eighteenth Mountain Infantry Division.
- Giorgis, Gäbräyas W., lance corporal. April 1, 2007, Kuta Bär. A member of the Second Brigade of the Twenty-Sixth (Wolafän) Infantry Division.
- Gobäzé, Samuél, captain. August 14, 2007, Bahar Dar. Military security officer of the Twenty-Sixth Infantry Division.
- Haylé, Bäyyenä, private. March 29, 2006, Sheré. A former TPLF fighter in the May Day Division.
- Haymanot, Taddäsä T., brigadier general. June 11, 2003, Addis Ababa. Head of military intelligence at the Ministry of National Defense.
- Jämbäré, Abära, major. March 12, 2003, Addis Ababa. Security officer of the Nadäw Command and later the Western Command.
- Jebril, Mohammäd, Haji†. February 3, 2006, Jijiga. An Ethiopian Somali residing in the town of Jijiga.
- Kassa, Andargachäw, captain. March 20, 2006, Märañña. Commander of a militia force.
- Kassa, Boggalä, captain. March 23, 2006, Dässé. Commander of a veteran brigade.
- Kéllo, Jagama, lieutenant general. October 17, 2007, Addis Ababa. Commander of various army units and adviser to the Därg for a year.
- Kendé, Bähaylu, brigadier general. June 3, 2003, Addis Ababa. Commander of the Thirty-Sixth Brigade and later deputy commander of the 102nd Airborne Division.

- Läggäsä, Şäggaw, Ato. March 16, 2006, Aläm Kätäma. A member of the antiguerrilla force (Shemeq) organized by the government.
- Lélissa, Märdasa, major general. March 17, 2003, Addis Ababa. Commander of the Eighteenth Mountain Infantry Division and later acting commander of the 605th Corps.
- Mäbraté, Alämu, lieutenant colonel. August 14, 2007, Baher Dar. Secretary of the WPE for the 603rd Corps.
- Mahmud, Saleh, Ato. February 11, 2008, Naples, Italy. A fighter in the EPLF army.
- Malkamu, Makuannent, Ato. March 8, 2006, Däbrä Tabor. A political cadre for the EPRDF during the battles of Guna.
- Mälläsä, Haylé, brigadier general. † June 4, 2008, London. Secretary of the WPE for South Gondär.
- Mammo, Täfärra, brigadier general. April 5, 2008, Addis Ababa. Commander of the Tēwodros Division in the EPDM army.
- Maryam, Abbäbä W., major general. October 25, 2007, Addis Ababa. Vice minister of defense and head of logistics between 1977 and 1991.
- Maryam, Abiy W., lieutenant. November 6, 2007, Addis Ababa. An officer in the Ethiopian Navy who took part in the Battle of Me'ewa. He was taken as POW by the EPLF to the Sahel and stayed there for two years.
- Maryam, Täsfayé H., brigadier general. March 13, 2003, Addis Ababa. Leader of the airborne unit that jumped at Naqfa in 1976 and also commander of one of the task forces in Eritrea from 1978 to 1979. Later, he organized and trained the Airborne Divisions. He is a recipient of the highest medal for gallantry.
- Mäsfen, Tächané, brigadier general. June 3, 2003, Addis Ababa. An Air Force pilot for more than thirty years and also head of the Planning and Operations Department of the Air Force.
- Mäshäsha, Dämessé, Ato. February 2, 2006, Jijiga. An English teacher who witnessed the Battle of Jijiga. He has a vivid memory of the battle and narrates it with great sensation.
- Mässälä, Gétachäw, sergeant. February 2, 2006, Jijiga. A participant in the defense of Jijiga against the Somali onslaught in 1977.
- Mohammäd, Täshomä, Ato. March 19, 2006, Wärä Ilu. A peasant residing near the town of Wärä Ilu.
- Mulaw, Nägga, private. March 2, 2006, Gondär. A paratrooper in the 102nd Airborne Division.
- Negatu, Wasihun, brigadier general. June 27, 2007, Addis Ababa. Acting commander of the 603rd Corps.
- Rätta, Kasahun, major. March 23, 2006, Dässé. A brigade commander who took part in Operation Lash and the Battle of Sheré.
- Şadeq, Edom G., private. March 18, 2006, Wärä Ilu. A spy and fighter for the EPRDF.
- Şadeq, H. Mäsqäl W., Ato. March 30, 2007, Mähal Méda. A resident of Mähal Méda.
- Şäggayé, Wubätu, brigadier general. † December 4, 2007, Washington, D.C. Commander of the Nadäw Command in 1982 and then commander of the SRA in March 1988.
- Sahlé, Mulu, officer. June 7, 2007, Addis Ababa. A private in the Thirty-Sixth Brigade of the Eighteenth Mountain Infantry Division.

- Säyed, Mohammäd, sergeant. April 3, 2007, Hayq. A private and NCO in the Ninth Brigade of the Third Infantry Division.
- Säyed, Umär, sheikh. March 21, 2006, Mount Guguftu. A resident of the small town of Guguftu.
- Seläshi, Wondemagän, colonel. May 29, 2003, Addis Ababa. A member of the Fifteenth Infantry Battalion and later commander of the Second Infantry Brigade based in Eritrea.
- Sellasé, Abbäbä H., brigadier general. June 19, 2007, Addis Ababa. Leader of the 605th Corps, then commander of the 603rd Corps.
- Taddäsä, Solomon, Ato. March 16, 2006, Aläm Kätäma. Commander of the antiguerilla force known as Shemeq.
- Takkälä, Berihun, private, March 27, 2006, Mäqälé. A former TPLF fighter.
- Tämänä, Bälay, Ato. March 9, 2006, Mount Guna. A peasant living in Mount Guna.
- Tänsay, Şadqan G., major general. November 1, 2007, Addis Ababa. A chief military strategist and the number two man in the TPLF military committee.
- Täsämma, Mälaku, Ato. March 9, 2006, Kemer Dengay. A local dignitary residing in the town of Kemer Dengay.
- Täsämma, Tänañä, none. February 2, 2006, Harär. The elder sister of Brigadier General Täshomä Täsämma, who committed suicide just before Meşewa fell into EPLF hands.
- Täsfahun, Asgälä, major. March 29, 2006, Sheré. A former TPLF fighter.
- Täshomä, Tayyé, constable. March 14, 2007, Däbarq. A former EPRDF fighter.
- Tebäbu, Tamrat, colonel. July 6, 2007, Addis Ababa. Intelligence officer of the 603rd Corps.
- Telahun, Elfnäsh, none. February 2, 2006, Jijiga. A POW captured by Somali soldiers from Awaré who spent eleven years in prison in Somalia.
- Tolosa, Täräfworq, private. March 18, 2003, Addis Ababa. A soldier in the Twenty-First Mountain Infantry Division who fought on the Kärkäbät front.
- Wasé, Amsalu, first lieutenant. March 4, 2006, Gondär. A political officer in the SRA.
- Wold, Täwoldä G., commander. March 22, 2006, Dässé. An EPDM fighter.
- Worqé, Çäräqä, none. March 16, 2006, Mount Zoma. A peasant woman living on the plateau of Zoma, overlooking Aläm Kätäma.
- Yeglätu, Mängestu, colonel. February 10, 2006, Harär. An artillery officer during the Somali-Ethiopian war.

* *Ato* is a title of respect in Ethiopia.

† Questions were sent to them and later responses were received by surface mail or e-mail.

‡ *Haji* is a title of respect for a Muslim who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca.

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Films Produced by the Military Government

LRR-10.504A and B, *The Somali-Ethiopian War, 1977–1978*.

LRR-10.505A, *Yä Guna Genbar* [The Guna Front], 1982 E.C.

LRR-10.505A, *Yä Qäy Kokäb Zämächa* [Operation Red Star], 1974 E.C.

VCZ-22A, *Yä Shefshefit Wegya* [The Battle of Shefshefit, Kärän], 1980 E.C.

- VCZ-4196A, *Yä Guna Genbar* [The Guna Front], 1982 E.C.
 VCZ-4198A, *Däbrä Tabor Genbar* [The Däbrä Tabor Front], 28–30/4/82 E.C.
 VCZ-4209A, *Däbrä Tabor Genbar* [The Däbrä Tabor Front], 6–8/5/82 E.C.
 VCZ-4208A, *Yä Hayq Tornät* [The Battle of Hayq], 10/5/82 E.C.
 VCZ-4207A, *Däbub Wollo Genbar* [The South Wollo Front], 1982 E.C.
 VCZ-4208A, *Yä Hayq Tornät* [The Battle of Hayq], 5–9/5/82 E.C.
 VCZ-4212A, *Yä Kuta Bär Genbar* [The Kuta Bär Front], 5/5/82 E.C.
 VCZ-4228A, *Yä Jägnoch Welo Bā Wollo Genbar* [The Day of the Gallants on the Wollo Front], Ter, 1982 E.C.
 VCZ-4241A, *Kemer Dengay Genbar* [The Kemer Dengay Front], 27/5/82 E.C.

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- LRR-55A, *Sälam Bā Tegel* [Peace Through Struggle], 1981–1982 E.C.
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